

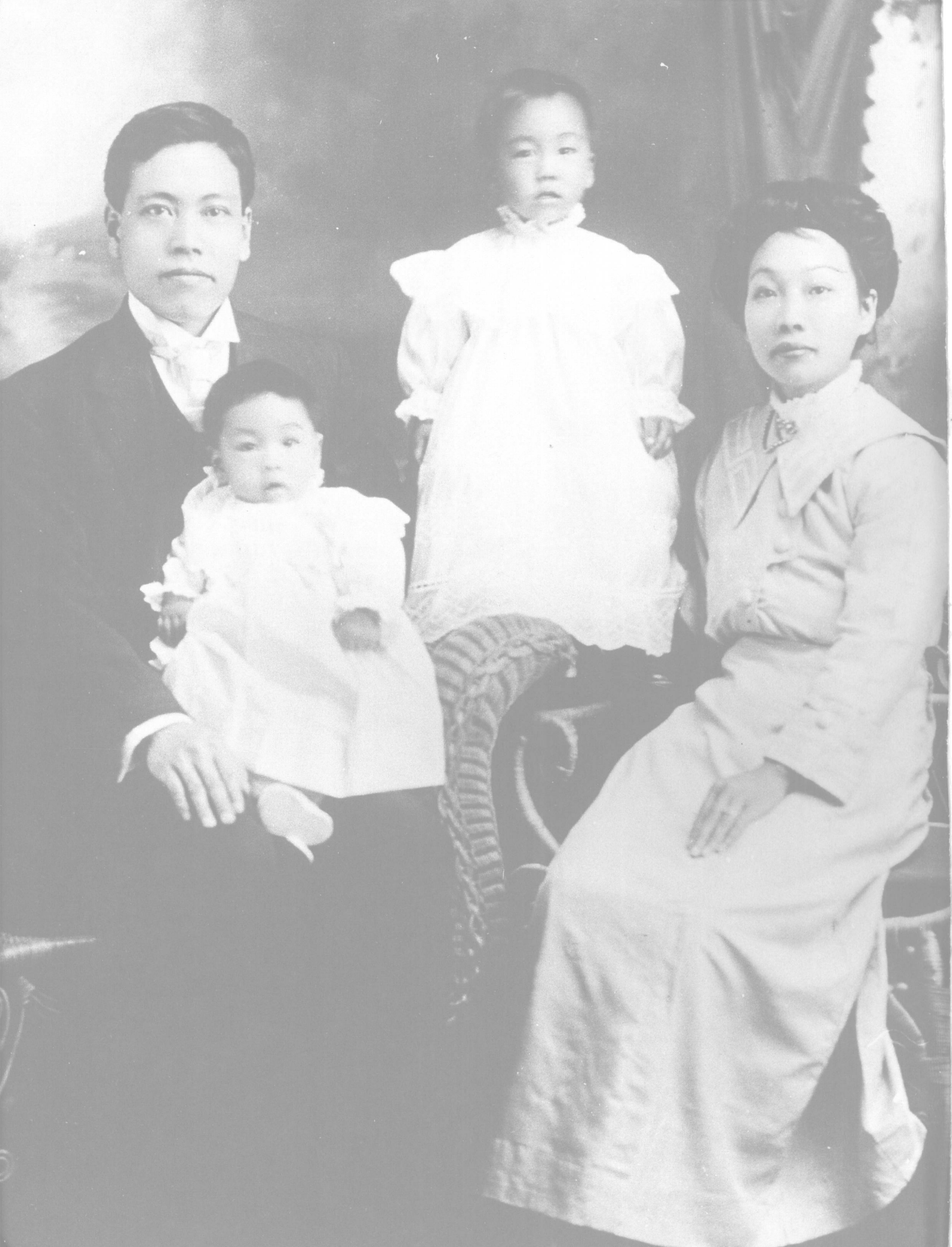
• THE •
CHINESE
AMERICAN
• FAMILY ALBUM •



DOROTHY AND THOMAS HOOBLER

with an introduction by Bette Bao Lord

THE CHINESE AMERICAN
F A M I L Y
A L B U M



AMERICAN FAMILY ALBUMS

THE CHINESE AMERICAN
FAMILY
ALBUM



DOROTHY AND THOMAS HOOBLER

Introduction by Bette Bao Lord

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Authors' Note

Scholars have long struggled with the problem of romanizing the Chinese language—writing Chinese with the 26 letters of the English alphabet. In the 19th century, two British scholars, Sir Thomas Wade and H. A. Giles, developed a system based on the pronunciations of Mandarin (northern) Chinese. Most English-language books about China followed the Wade-Giles system or a modified version of it until 1979. That year, the Chinese press agency decided to employ a new system, called pinyin. The *New York Times* adopted pinyin spellings and since then, so have most book publishers.

As we gathered the selections for this book, we found that the Chinese Americans who wrote them used many different kinds of romanizations. In all cases, we have let the writers' original spellings stand because we wanted to allow Chinese Americans to speak for themselves.

In the introductions that we wrote, we have generally used pinyin spellings. However, to avoid confusion, we used the Chinese Americans' own spellings to introduce some chapters or selections. This is not a solution that will satisfy everyone, but we felt it was the clearest way to give our readers an insight into Chinese American history and life.

Cover: *Lai Ngan (center left) and Lee Kwong (center right) with their children in Nogales, Arizona, around 1905.*

Frontispiece: *Mr. and Mrs. Fong Wan and their children in California around 1910.*

Contents page: *A 19th-century miner in Arizona.*

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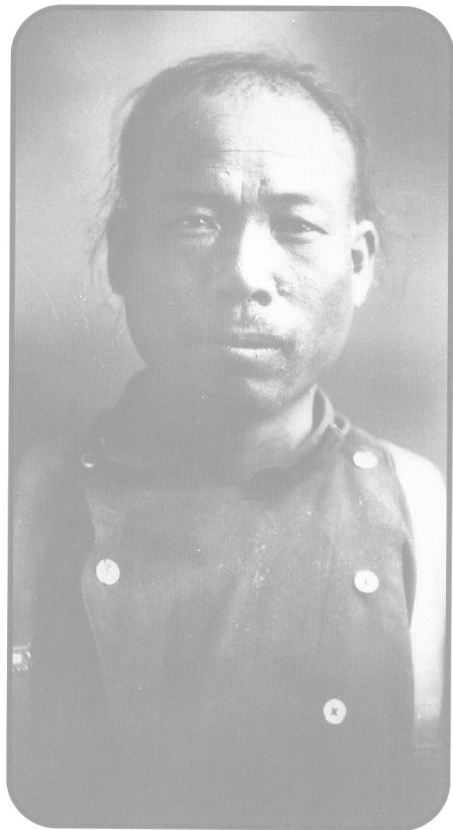
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Bette Bao in front of her house in Brooklyn in 1947.

Shanghai-born Bette Bao Lord is the author of two novels, *Spring Moon*, which was nominated for the American Book Award, and *Eighth Moon*, about her youngest sister's life in China. Mrs. Lord is also the author of a children's book, *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, which is based on her early years in the United States. Her moving and richly textured account of contemporary China, *Legacies*, conveys the experiences of members of her own family still living in China as well as those of a broad spectrum of friends throughout the country. Mrs. Lord was co-producer of the People's Art Theatre, Beijing, production of *The Caine Mutiny*, directed by Charlton Heston, and a consultant to CBS News for its coverage of the Tienanmen Square events in 1989. She has been honored with the American Women for International Understanding award, the National Committee for U.S.-China Relations award, and the Woman of the Year award from the Chinatown (New York) Planning Council. She is married to Winston Lord, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and former U.S. ambassador to China, and they have two children.

Bette Bao (center) with her parents (in the back row) in China.



*Bette Bao Lord signing copies of *Spring Moon* in China in 1988.*



Bette Bao Lord with her husband, Winston Lord (far left), and their son and her parents.



INTRODUCTION

by Bette Bao Lord

My voyage to America began in the autumn of 1946. I was eight years old, sporting pigtails—an innocent, not even armed with a passing acquaintance of A, B, or C. To my chagrin, the ocean was not the vast jade lagoon that I had always envisioned but about as pacific as a fierce dragon with chilies up its snout. And so I bravely cowered in my bunk battling to keep down what I assumed was an authentic American delicacy—spaghetti with meatballs.

Only yesterday, resting my chin on the rails of the S.S. *Marylinx*, I peered into the mist for *Mei Guo*, beautiful country. It refused to appear. Then, within a blink, there was the golden gate, more like the portals to heaven than the arches of a man-made bridge.

I arrived in Brooklyn, New York, on a Sunday. On Monday I was enrolled at P.S. 8. By putting up 10 fingers, I found myself sentenced to the fifth grade. It was a terrible mistake. By American reckoning, I had just turned eight. And so I was the shortest student by a head or two in class. In retrospect, I suppose that everyone just supposed that Chinese were supposed to be small.

Only yesterday, holding my hand over my heart, I joined schoolmates to stare at the Stars and Stripes and say along: “I pledge a lesson to the frog of the United States of America. And to the wee puppet for witches’ hands. One Asian, in the vestibule, with little tea and just rice for all.”

Only yesterday, rounding third base in galoshes, I swallowed a barrelful of tears wondering what wrong I had committed to anger my teammates so. Why were they all madly screaming at me to go home, go home?

Only yesterday, parroting the patter on our Philco radio, I mastered a few mouthfuls of syllables and immediately my teacher began eliciting my opinions. Not only was I stupefied by the challenge of puzzling together “Pepsi-Cola hits the spot,” “I’d walk a mile for a Camel,” or “Hi-ho Silver,” into a coherent thought, but I was amazed by the fact that an exalted teacher would solicit the opinion of a lowly student. Teachers in China never did that.

Eventually, I came to realize that the merits of one’s opinions were not the determining goal of the exercise. The goal was to nurture a civil society where everyone is free to speak. Today, when political correctness threatens the rigor of our intellectual debates, how I

value this aspect of my early education! To me, the cacophony of puddingheads spewing their views is preferable to the clarion call of even the greatest emperor.

Only yesterday, standing still a head or two short at graduation, I felt as tall as the Statue of Liberty as I recited Walt Whitman: “I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear... Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else.”

Thus I have never forgotten that one need not lose one’s native culture in order to become an American. On the contrary, this individual feels doubly blessed. For to me, Americans—though as different as sisters and brothers are—belong to the same family. For to me, America is a road cleared by the footfalls of millions of immigrants and paved with something far more precious than gold—grit and hope.



A middle-class couple in 19th-century China.



CHAPTER ONE

THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

In A.D. 499, a Buddhist monk named Hui-shen returned to China after a long journey. He told of a visit he had made across the sea to a land called Fu-Sang, which lay far to the east. Modern scholars have speculated that Fu-Sang might actually have been America.

A tantalizing clue to this possibility is the Monterey cypress tree, which grows on the coast of California and nowhere else in the Western Hemisphere. A naturalist took a branch of one such tree to the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915. When she showed it to a visiting Buddhist monk, he recognized that it was similar to a kind of cypress that grows in China. Could Hui-shen have planted the seeds of this tree in California? If so, he was the first Chinese visitor to today's United States.

Fourteen hundred years later, the first Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States, fleeing famine and revolution. In the 19th century, Chung Kuo (the Middle Kingdom), as the Chinese called their homeland, was a country in decline. An alien dynasty of Manchu emperors had ruled the Chinese Empire since 1644. Most Chinese resented the Manchus, and the government's unpopularity rose when it proved unable to deal with the threat of European domination.

Europeans sought to trade their goods—such as opium—with the Chinese Empire, but they met resistance. The Manchu dynasty restricted foreigners to the port of Canton, in Kwangtung Province on the southeast coast. But after British warships demonstrated their superior power in the First Opium War (1839–42), China was forced to open more ports to foreign trade. As a further penalty for its defeat, China ceded to Great Britain the island of Hong Kong.

The intrusion of the West came at a time when China was experiencing a rapid rise in population. In 1700, China's population was about 150 million. It had swelled to 400 million by 1850. This put enormous strains on the farmers to produce enough food to support the people. A small number of landlords controlled much of the farmland on which the majority of Chinese toiled in poverty.

Suffering and famine led to a peasant uprising, the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), which shook the empire to its roots. More than 20 million people died in the fighting, and the disruption caused more economic hardship. Some Chinese began to flee their homeland to seek opportunity elsewhere.

The vast majority of the early immigrants to the United States came from Kwangtung Province, in

the southern part of China. Canton, the provincial capital, and seven districts in the Pearl River delta region of Kwangtung provided more than 95 percent of the 19th-century immigrants. Officially, the Chinese Empire forbade its citizens to leave the country. Even so, Chinese had been emigrating since ancient times. There were many Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia. Because the British-held island of Hong Kong was off the southern coast of Kwangtung, it was relatively easy for people to go there on small boats and book passage to the United States.

Two distinct groups of people, the Punti and the Hakka, lived in the villages of Kwangtung. The Punti were the original inhabitants of the area. The Hakka were descendants of northern Chinese who had spread to the region after China expanded to the south. A third group, the Tanka, lived in boats along the coast, where they had practiced their trade as fishermen throughout Chinese history. Each of these groups spoke a different dialect and they were often rivals—both at home and overseas. Fighting between the Punti and the Hakka devastated many Chinese villages and spurred the flight overseas. The *Hsin-ning hsien-chih* (Gazetteer of the Hsin-ning Dis-

trict) described hardships in the Pearl River delta region caused by fighting between Punti and Hakka: "The fields in the four directions were choked with weeds. Small families found it difficult to make a living and often drowned their girl babies because of the impossibility of looking after them."

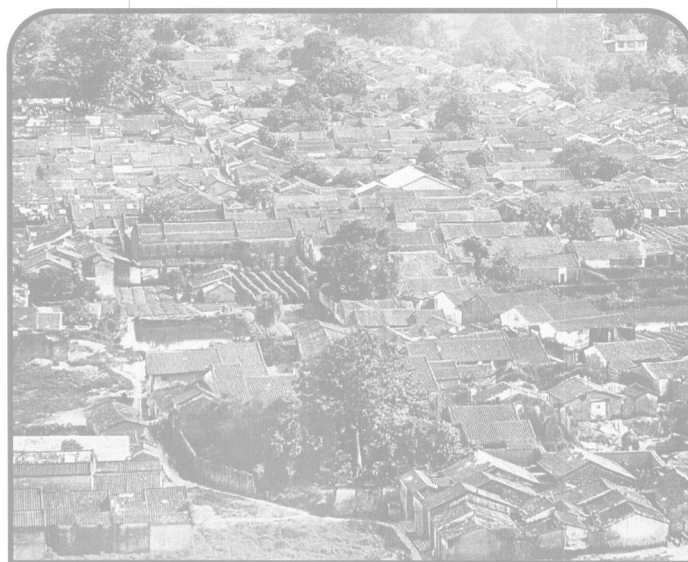
These earliest immigrants were accustomed to a tropical climate.

In the delta region of Kwangtung Province, long, hot summers from April to October are followed by cool, dry winters and two months of muggy weather. Seasonal monsoons bring abundant rainfall, making rice the primary crop. In the wintertime, the farmers raised ducks in the rice paddies. Other crops include sugarcane, vegetables, litchi nuts, bananas, mangoes, plums, and oranges. All these foods became ingredients in Chinese American cooking.

In addition, the farmers of Kwangtung planted mulberry trees so that silkworms could feed on the leaves. Chinese women learned the delicate task of unwinding the silkworm cocoons to produce China's most prized cloth.

The traditional Chinese way of life was guided by the teachings of Confucius, a philosopher who lived 2,500 years ago. All Chinese government officials had to pass a grueling series of tests on Confucian literature to obtain their posts. These officials, sometimes called mandarins, were at the very top of Chinese society.

Confucian values included a reverence for the past as an example for the future, respect for elders, and worship of ancestors. Ancestor worship linked families closely and tied the Chinese to their native villages. Every Chinese wanted to be buried in his home village, where he knew that generations of descendants would honor his memory.



A view of the city of Canton, the capital of Kwangtung Province, around 1864. Before 1842, Canton was the only port open to foreign goods. For centuries, it also served as the departure point for Chinese leaving the country.

Confucianism emphasized the importance of family. The Chinese ideal was a large family with several generations living under one roof. This custom was most common for the wealthy, but it was not unusual for married couples of any social class to live with their children in the home of the husband's parents.

There was no higher Confucian ideal than filial piety, the respect and reverence for parents. "Filial piety," wrote one Chinese consul to the United States, "is a cardinal virtue my parents have brought over from China.... A Chinese

child, no matter where he lives, is brought up to recognize that he cannot shame his parents.... Before a Chinese child makes a move, he stops to think what the reaction of his parents will be."

Confucian society was male-dominated. The female's place was in the home, and a wife owed obedience both to her husband and to his parents. Marriages were com-

monly arranged by the parents, and young women had no say in the decision. Men could take concubines, or secondary wives, although this was the case only with the wealthy. The custom of binding the feet of young girls—a painful process that ensured tiny "lily feet"—often made women virtual cripples who seldom left their home. Foot binding was not so widespread among farm families, where women were needed to work in the fields.

The Chinese found truth in several religions, and saw no

conflict in practicing all of them. Over time, Buddhism and Taoism blended with the teachings of Confucius. Also, a folk religion provided gods for all occasions. The Chinese view was that heaven, earth, and the underworld had spirits whose actions could affect humankind. A Chinese offered prayers to whichever gods seemed appropriate for the occasion.

The California gold rush of 1849–50 started the first great wave of Chinese immigration to the United States. News of the discovery of gold on the Sacramento River in 1848 excited people even

in remote Chinese villages. Stories about Gum Shan (the Golden Mountain) created dreams of finding great wealth. It was rumored that nuggets of gold lay on the ground, just waiting for someone to pick them up.

Even earlier, Chinese had gone to Hawaii, which was at that time an independent kingdom. Hawaii had another mountain of riches that attracted the Chinese—sandalwood, which was greatly prized in China, where it was used to create beautiful furniture.

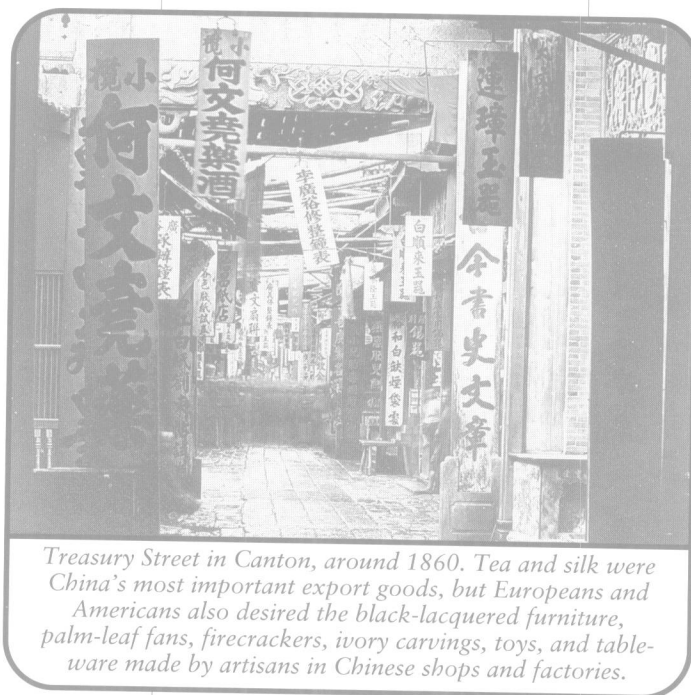
Chinese immigrants continued to flock to the United States after the gold rush ended. At that time, the United States was a growing country that needed workers. Even menial jobs paid high wages, by Chinese standards. Some Chinese returned home with the wealth they had earned, prompting others to try their luck in the new country.

In the 19th century, the great majority of these Chinese were sojourners. They planned to make money and return to China, rather than putting down roots in the United States. Most of them were farmers who left their wives and families behind. The vast majority were male because in the Confucian system, women were supposed to stay home and take care of their children and in-laws.

There was also a small number of merchants among the immigrants. In China, merchants had low status, but in America they

would become the leaders of the Chinese community. Indeed, many former farmers became merchants in the New World.

In 1882, the United States prohibited Chinese immigration. The ban lasted for 60 years. Some resourceful Chinese found ways to get around it, but large-scale immigration did not resume until after World War II.



Treasury Street in Canton, around 1860. Tea and silk were China's most important export goods, but Europeans and Americans also desired the black-lacquered furniture, palm-leaf fans, firecrackers, ivory carvings, toys, and tableware made by artisans in Chinese shops and factories.

Political upheaval in China caused an influx of new immigrants. In 1949, China's long civil war ended, and the communist victors established the People's Republic of China. The partisans of the losing side, the Nationalists, set up their own government on the offshore island of Taiwan. In the years since then, refugees from the People's Republic have made their way to the United States in search of freedom.

When the United States and the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations in 1979, it became easier for Chinese to emi-

grate from the mainland. A new communist leadership under Deng Xiaoping allowed greater freedoms. However, a budding democracy movement led by Chinese students was abruptly crushed in June 1989 when tanks moved against demonstrators in Tienanmen Square in the Chinese capital of Beijing. Political refugees have continued to arrive in the

United States since that time.

Chinese living in Taiwan have also immigrated to the United States for educational and economic opportunities. Another group of today's Chinese immigrants comes from the British colony of Hong Kong, which will revert to the control of mainland China in 1997. Fearing an uncertain future under communist rule, many of Hong Kong's residents have obtained visas to live in the United States.

During the past two centuries of immigration, the Chinese

have brought their great skills and talents to this country. The Confucian ethic, which includes respect for hard work and education, has made them valuable citizens. Chinese helped to build the great railroads that linked the two coasts of the United States. The skill of Chinese farmers helped to make California one of the richest farming areas of our country. In modern times, Chinese American scientists, business leaders, and artists have enriched the life of their new country. Through them, the ancient culture of China has become a part of America.



Most of the early Chinese immigrants to the United States came from Kwangtung Province in southeast China, as shown on this map of present-day China. Today, many come from other regions, including Hong Kong and the island nation of Taiwan.



A Chinese boy shows off his trained bird (around 1900). Acrobats, jugglers, magicians, and storytellers often performed in the streets of Chinese cities.

IMAGES OF THE HOMELAND

The Chinese who came to America retained strong memories of their families and homes in China. In 1931, 78-year-old Huie Kin set down his recollections of his boyhood in southern Kwangtung Province.

Father and mother had their hands full bringing us up with what little they could raise on their small farm. Our home had two large rooms. It was the common practice to keep chickens and pigs in the courtyard; but the family cow, because of its importance, shared the rooms with the family. I remember that we had a cow with velvety brown fur and short, curved horns. Some of the neighbors had water buffaloes with ugly black bristles and unusually long and heavy horns. These were not so pleasant as roommates. My father and I and the brown cow had one of the rooms, with the kitchen stove in one corner; and mother had the other room. Near the door was the *Men-kong*, the deity who was supposed to keep evil out of the house; above the cattle stall was the animal deity; while over the stove presided the kitchen god. These figures were painted on red paper pasted on the wall.

In 1906, Lee Chew, a successful merchant in New York's Chinatown, recalled his boyhood in a village near Canton in the 1860s.

When I was a baby I was kept in our house all the time with my mother, but when I was a boy of seven I had to sleep at nights with other boys of the village—about thirty of them in one house. The girls are separated the same way.... In spite of the fact that any man may correct them for a fault, Chinese boys have good times and plenty of play. We played games like tag, and other games like shinny and a sort of football called *yin*. We had dogs to play with—plenty of dogs and good dogs—that understand Chinese as well as American dogs understand American language. We hunted with them, and we also went fishing and had as good a time as American boys, perhaps better, as we were almost always together in our house, which was a sort of boys' club house, so we had many playmates.... But all our play outdoors was in the daylight, because there were many graveyards about and after dark, so it was said, black ghosts with flaming mouths and eyes and long claws and teeth would come from these and tear to pieces and devour any one whom they might meet.

It was not all play for us boys, however. We had to go to school, where we learned to read and write and to recite the

precepts of Kong-foo-tsze [Confucius] and the other Sages, and stories about the great Emperors of China, who ruled with the wisdom of gods and gave to the whole world the light of high civilization and the culture of our literature, which is the admiration of all nations.

A few of the earliest immigrants came from prosperous families. Wong Bing Woo, whose father was an exporter of shark fins, married a scholar who brought her to the United States after he had established a practice as an herb physician. Wong Bing Woo's daughter, a journalist, describes her mother's childhood in China around 1880.

The family compound consisted of 10 grey brick buildings with curving Chinese roofs, with a family unit occupying each house. There were guest houses for visitors, separate ones for men and women. An eight-foot high wall of grey brick surrounded the compound. A barred gate, attended by servants, opened into a courtyard. This elaborate layout was called "Gim Sing Tong," meaning "Built With Money Earned by Industry," and covered ground equal to an average American city block.

Parklike gardens graced the estate. There were trees of all kinds: kumquat, apricot, lemon, lichee nut, loquat, and tangerine. Flowers grew profusely. One, an orange flower called *dan gway*, was as tall as the buildings and bloomed in September. Its fragrance permeated the area even beyond the . . . gate.

*At home I obey my parents.
At school I obey my teachers.
In school
Respect the teacher
Love your classmates.*

—From a Chinese primer

Nineteenth-century upper-class Chinese families, like this one, had a luxurious life. It was the custom for both men and women to shave the hair above their foreheads. Women wore white makeup and painted their eyebrows and lips.

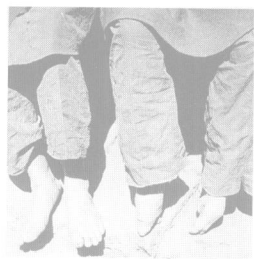


May you be blessed with many sons!

—Common Chinese greeting to a friend, the usual way of wishing him good luck



Because tiny “lily feet” were regarded as a mark of feminine beauty, young girls had their feet tightly bound to stunt their growth. A painful process that made women virtual cripples, foot binding was usually an upper-class practice. Farm families could not afford to lose the work of women in the fields. The practice has been banned in modern China.



Each family member had a servant whose sole duty was to attend to his or her needs. Mama had a nurse (*goo mah*) and later on a maid (*mui jay*).... Mama’s leisurely day began at ten, when she rose and breakfasted on *jook* (rice gruel).... The little girls played house with toy dishes and cooking utensils, but they had no dolls. There were games like blind man’s bluff, hide and seek, and improvised shows where the children would dress up in their parents’ clothes. Adults told them stories, mostly tales that dealt with ethical conduct and the necessity of filial devotion to parents....

Between the ages of 8 and 10, Mama learned to sew and embroider.... In those days, it was thought education for girls was unnecessary, but Mama’s father was progressive. He wanted his daughters to learn; so Mama was taught to read by a tutor at the age of eight, and to hold her brush and write characters. Later, she learned a little history and geography as well as some arithmetic, including use of the abacus. However, at age 12 her tutoring was stopped because her tutor was a man....

The Wong girls were taught early how to beautify themselves. Mama was only five when her ears were pierced for earrings. On special holidays, she was allowed to use powder, rouge, and to color her lips with red-coated paper creased in accordion folds.... Probably the most traumatic event of Mama’s childhood was the binding of her feet at age six. It would have been done earlier, but her mother’s death required that three years pass before the binding. Aunt Beautiful Pearl bound the feet with cotton cloths. It was a tortuous process, and Mama cried with pain for months. Her feet were not unbound until after [the birth of her own child]. Mama was extremely sensitive on the subject of her bound feet. She was ashamed of them and didn’t want to talk about the Chinese custom of lily feet. None of us [her children] ever saw her bare feet; she always wore white sox over them. Her bound feet were a lifelong burden, restricting her activities in every way.

Chung Kun-ai was born in China in 1865. Fourteen years later he immigrated to Hawaii, where he lived for the rest of his long life. In 1958, he recalled fondly his boyhood in China.

Life in a Chinese village was very interesting and attractive to us youngsters, especially our lunar New Year celebrations. That was the one occasion during the whole year that the villagers took off a whole two weeks to enjoy themselves. For weeks before the New Year’s, preparations had been going on. The wine vats had been filled with rice and other ingredients and set aside to allow the grain to ferment. Every year our family stored away enough jugs of yellow rice wine to replenish those consumed....

Glutinous rice had to be ground into rice-flour for New Year pastries. The house had to be cleaned and the kitchen god had to be escorted to heaven a week before New Year’s. Everyone had to have new and colorful gowns and other garments,



One of the tasks of women on farms was to grind rice into flour, as the mother of this family is doing. The man in the photo may not be her husband, but her father-in-law. In the Chinese extended family, a married woman was expected to serve her husband's parents until their death.

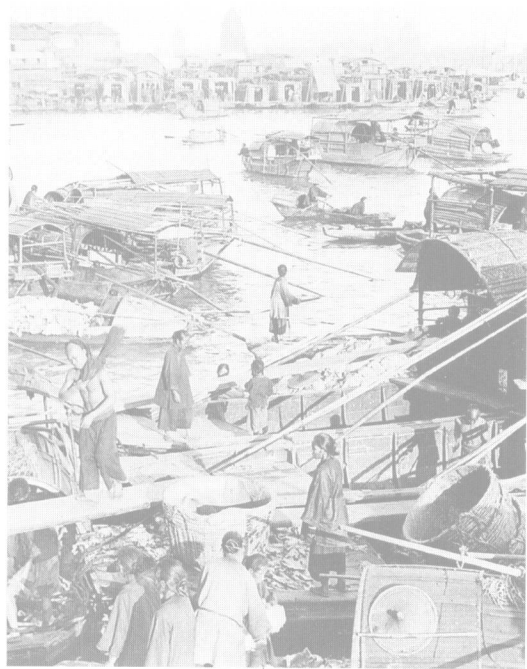
and these had to be sewed and embroidered by hand. Members of the family who had left the village to earn a living elsewhere also tried their best to make this annual pilgrimage back to the ancestral home, in time to participate in the family gathering on New Year's Eve. Each family closed the old year with as sumptuous a feast as it could afford. The dining and wining went on till midnight, when firecrackers were kept burning and the proper obeisance paid to all the gods that ruled the Chinese universe....

We youngsters could do nothing wrong during this season, for New Year's was the only time during the whole year when it was inauspicious for anyone to scold or nag.... And so we did as we well pleased and none dared defy the gods by chastising us when we were naughty. If only the whole year could be one New Year's!

Our elders...paraded through the villages with their dragons or lions, prancing and dancing as firecrackers were thrown at their feet. Shopkeepers and the wealthy in the village would show their appreciations and also wish themselves greater wealth by tying a gift of money in red paper with a spring green of vegetable leaf, just high enough above the gate to call for special effort by the dancers to collect their "fee." The Chinese words for green vegetables (*sung choi*) and those for growing riches (*sung choi*) are homonyms, and what Chinese does not want to grow richer?...The front porch of our home was paved with granite, and we used to gather there in the eve-



Growing rice, the staple food of China, was an arduous task. Each seedling had to be transplanted by hand into the flooded fields, where it would grow to maturity. Here, a water buffalo is harnessed to a machine that pumps water into the rice fields.



The Tanka fished the waters along the south China coast for centuries. Tanka families lived on the boats that went to sea each day and returned filled with fish that they sold on the wharves of cities like Canton.

nings after supper to listen to our elders. Someone would start off with a story from the Three Kingdoms period, perhaps one of the many stories of K'ung Ming, the sagest tactician in that period of Chinese history, of how he outwitted the enemy.... And the story-teller, whenever the action became exciting, would burst into lines of poetry that said so much in so few words, often chanting the words in sing-song fashion that appealed to us. And that night, before we could fall asleep, we must repeat those lines of poetry until they too became a part of our being. We had become heirs to our great literary tradition.

Some childhoods were not so happy. In 1936, an old woman known as Mrs. Teng told her life story to an interviewer. Mrs. Teng pushed back her black hair with her gnarled hands, worn from years of work. She recalled how she came to Hawaii at the age of nine.

Lucky come Hawaii? Sure, lucky, come Hawaii. Before I come to Hawaii I suffer much. Only two kinds of people in China, the too poor and the too rich. I never can forget my days in China....

In a small crowded village, a few miles from Hongkong, fifty-four years ago I was born. There were four in our family, my mother, my father, my sister and me. We lived in a two room house.... How can we live on six baskets of rice which were paid twice a year for my father's duty as a night watchman?...

Sometimes we went hungry for days. My mother and me would go over the harvested rice fields of the peasants to pick the grains they dropped. Once in a while my mother would go near a big pile of grain and take a handful. She would then sit on them until the working men went home....

Father was suffering from dysentery so my mother went out to look for herbs. My father told me to take the baby out to play and not to come back until late. Being always afraid of him I gladly took the baby out. We were three houses away watching a man kill a chicken. Pretty soon a man came to call me to go home for my father is dead.... I took one look at my father dangling from the ceiling and started to run to where I don't know....

My mother called me to her and put me on her lap. "Do you want me to remarry or will you be a good girl and go to stay with a certain lady," she said. I told her that I do not want her to remarry but I will go with the lady so that she will have money to pay for my father's coffin.... I leaned my head against her breast and...I knew that was the last time I would be so near to her.

I heard my mother tell this go-between lady that she wants me put in the hands of a lady or man who would come to Hawaii because she has heard Hawaii is a land of good fortune.