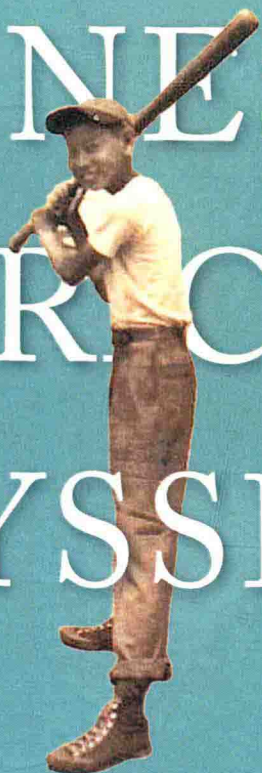


A CHINESE AMERICAN ODYSSEY



How a Retired Psychologist
Makes a Hit as a Historian

"When you drink water, remember the source"

CHINESE PROVERB

John Jung

CHINESE/AMERICAN ODYSSEY

How a Retired Psychologist
Makes a Hit as a Historian

John Jung



Yin and Yang Press

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Praise for *A Chinese American Odyssey*

John Jung is a phenomenon: a career academic turned “outsider” scholar to reshape our understanding of the Chinese American experience by his novel historical studies, especially of communities in his native South. *A Chinese American Odyssey* provides readers yet another work to savor. Part memoir, part how-to book, it provides a detailed and engaging study of author Jung's transformation from a psychologist into a historian, as well as lessons for independent researchers.

Greg Robinson, Professor of History, University of Quebec. *After Camp: Portraits in Midcentury Japanese American Life and Politics*

A Chinese American Odyssey documents John Jung's fascinating metamorphosis as he retired from psychology to become an important voice in Chinese American history. And John's richly contextualized tales of his unique experiences as a Chinese makes the book an insightful cultural biography. Anyone interested in Chinese America, or how to succeed in a post-retirement career, should read this highly enjoyable memoir.

Yong Chen, Professor of History, University of California, Irvine. *Chop Suey USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America*.

A fascinating book about a retirement journey that started with the author's memoir about growing up in a laundry in Macon, Georgia, where his family were the only Chinese. He next published three more rich and important books about Chinese immigrants in North America. *A Chinese American Odyssey* is an account of a vital retirement, of people he met along the way, history of Chinese in North America, the ins and outs of self-publishing, the book talk circuit, and much more.

Paul Rosenblatt, Professor Emeritus, Family Social Science, University of Minnesota. *The Impact of Racism on African American Families: Literature as Social Science*

With a researcher's reliance on evidence, a painter's eye for detail, and a comedian's well-timed punch lines, John Jung's four previous narratives have shown how to write well, live well, and merge the two in mindful social contemplation. He has a keen sense of style and craft, which I witnessed as a student in his research classes where his commitment to train up-and-coming scholars was infectious. *Odyssey* clearly shows he is a master teacher. Jung's books epitomize good scholarship: his writing informs and compels us to want more beauty and time for reflection. His studies of the Chinese American experience in a Southern context humanize us all by complicating the South we think we know. *Odyssey* focuses on the *process* of writing life stories to open the curtain to reveal the awful beauty of the personal difficulties that have made his Chinese American histories so impactful with an ever-growing regional, national, and international audience. Dr. Jung demonstrates the intellectual power of creative scholarship and his generous spirit offers practical guidance for those who want to move ahead with telling their own story.

Stephanie Y. Evans, Chair, African American Studies, Africana Women's Studies, and History, Clark Atlanta University *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History*.

John Jung has done it again with his quirky memoir "A Chinese American Odyssey." He provides a wonderfully kaleidoscopic view of Chinese American history from inside out and outside in and this time he has even thrown in the kitchen sink in this accounting of his incredible, post-academia publishing career. All will be the richer for reading this lively tale. Tag along on his varied adventures, many of a serendipitous nature, in search of some fast fading history and those who lived it, including himself.

Mel Brown, *Chinese Heart of Texas: The San Antonio Community 1875-1975. TexAsia; San Antonio's Asian Communities 1978-2008*.

John Jung is the epitome of a retiree who never fades away. He just changed his academic focus to expand his horizons into the field of Chinese American social history, and expose the struggles and triumphs of the second and third generations of laundry operators and restaurateurs who planted footholds in many a Chinatown.

Sylvia Sun Minnick, *SAMFOW: The San Joaquin Chinese Legacy*.

**To Those Who Had to Eat Bitterness
So Their Descendants Could Taste Sweetness**

Foreword

John Jung never aspired to be astonishing. It just keeps happening. After a long, productive career as a psychology professor and researcher, he started a whole new career. Like Odysseus retiring from war to become an intrepid traveler, in retirement John began an odyssey of astonishing creativity and growth.

His journey began with a memoir, but not the sort expected of a retired psychology professor. He pivoted to a new topic and genre. A flavor of his first post-retirement book, *Southern Fried Rice*, is reflected by a reviewer's comments printed on the back cover:

"... Based on his experience as a child in the only Chinese family in [1930s] Macon, Georgia . . . Jung's story is a fascinating account of the negotiation of personal and ethnic identity in a foreign environment. His narrative highlights many of the features of the larger society, including both government policy and situational practice that shape the lives of immigrants, both then and now."

Including this new book, "A Chinese American Odyssey," John, the astonisher, has published five books as a public historian of the Chinese in America. Astonishing. Again.

Perhaps his talent for astonishment emerged when he and his family lived above their laundry from the 1920s until the mid-1950s, the only Chinese in the city. Operating a laundry was not unusual for an immigrant Chinese family, but its location was: the harshly segregated, Deep South city of Macon, Georgia.

There were only two social addresses in 1930s Macon: White or Black. The Jung children posed a dilemma for practitioners of racial apartheid. Apparently the local cultural solution was declaring John and his family white or at least treating them as non-black. He remembers as a small boy being scolded by a white woman for drinking from a water fountain reserved for blacks. He had been socially declared white, but his mother taught it wasn't true. He was Chinese. But he was still directed to the white water fountains and attended the white-only public schools.

He didn't feel Chinese no matter what his mother told him, or racist insults assumed. He did not know Chinese cultural ways of being and interacting, something he quickly discovered when teenaged John, his mother, and siblings moved into San Francisco's large, robust Chinese community. He was accepted as Chinese, but he never identified fully with being Chinese.

In high school, college, and graduate school, John practiced cultural assimilation. Armed with a Ph.D. from Northwestern's prestigious psychology department, and mentored by a leading learning researcher of the era (B. J. Underwood), John succeeded as a professor in Canada and California. He taught well, published often, and did not perish.

Many who knew John from graduate school to retirement (including myself) never learned of his family history. He never talked about it. To my knowledge he never expressed any strong interest in racial and ethnic topics or issues, even during '60s and '70s when they were often headline news. So he is accurate when he reports in this book that becoming a public historian of Chinese in America was "especially improbable because my personal identification as a Chinese American was not a strong one, partly because my contact with Chinese people had been minimal during most of my life, especially in my youth.... During my high school and college years, although I developed cordial friendships with Chinese peers in a Chinatown community center and church, I always felt I was not "as Chinese" as they were. my Chinese identity that had started to develop during my high school and college years in the San Francisco Bay area deteriorated, and continued to be minimal at best for many years."

Given this history, neither John, or any of us who knew him the last 55 years, would have predicted in retirement he'd become a significant contributor to Chinese American history studies and a compelling voice for Chinese Americans growing up in families that operated laundries, groceries, and restaurants.

But there's more to John's post-retirement books than interesting history and sound scholarship. In retirement, the books he's written recount a personal journey from fully assimilated American to discovery of a Chinese identity to a fully bicultural Chinese American identity. In a sense, this book might be titled

“An American Chinese Odyssey” to reflect better the direction taken in his post-retirement journey.

Personal growth is also an underlying theme in Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Growth portrayed as a journey of challenging times, multiple temptations, and successes too. “A Chinese American Odyssey” recounts John’s growth not only in a new discipline, but in his feeling Chinese.

But this book is much more than a story of his personal growth. It proves that retirement need not be an end, but can be a beginning. It’s an inspiration not only for old professors, but everyone — because sooner or later, if you are lucky, you will retire and wonder what’s left. A lot is possible, if you know John’s story.

For those inspired in retirement to become an author, “A Chinese American Odyssey” can help. In this book John focused “on the creative process of research, discovery, and writing, the self-publishing process, and the tasks of self-promotion and marketing.” Describing the book, he writes, “This is a personal account, and not a “How To” guide. Rather I describe the ups and downs of planned and unplanned experiences that unfolded in my new career.”

“A Chinese American Odyssey” implies in several places that John regards this as his final act as public historian. But knowing his history, who would be astonished if he did it again — started a new research project, wrote another book? I wouldn’t. After all, Odysseus didn’t remain idle when he ended his journey.

Ronald Gallimore
Distinguished Professor Emeritus
University of California, Los Angeles

Preface

After more than 40 years as a professor of psychology, I retired in 2007 and stumbled into a new career in which I studied the lives and experiences of Chinese immigrants and their descendants in the U. S. and Canada in small businesses such as laundries, restaurants, and grocery stores. I wrote four books that documented their struggles to survive in an unfamiliar land against staunch racial prejudice and overwhelming hardships. I also publicized my findings at over 80 book signing events across the country.

The present book is quite different in its purpose from my previous four books, and I will not refer to the content from those books except in passing. Instead, the focus of this book is on the creative process of researching and writing, and on the self-publishing process, and the tasks of self-promotion and marketing. This is a personal account, and not a “How To” guide. But anyone researching, writing, and promoting a book on *any* subject may be able to learn from the ups and downs of planned and unplanned experiences that unfolded in my new career. In this book I will describe some of the most significant events, people, and experiences associated with my post-retirement career as a public historian.

With *A Chinese American Odyssey* I hope that seeing how I studied, wrote, and spoke about the history of Chinese in America will help guide and encourage others to undertake similar writing and publishing activities to further the understanding and improvement of the place of Chinese in America. What I have learned may help others avoid some of my mistakes and obstacles that confronted me.

This book, like chop suey, is a mixture of ingredients, and multifaceted. It includes topics of history as well as pragmatic issues, such as how I researched, wrote, published, and promoted books without a traditional publisher. The playing field for publishing has not only been leveled, it has been revolutionized. The availability of many software tools for authors, many free or inexpensive, and the existence of rich sources of archival material on the Web has redefined the process and means of writing books. For example, the inclusion of hyperlinks in the e-book version of

this book allows readers to access much more information than is presented in this book by simply clicking on the links. Since hyperlinks in a paperback book are *not* active or functional, I have supplied them as endnotes for each chapter, which unfortunately, is not an ideal solution because readers will have the tedious task of typing hyperlinks accurately into the URL window of a Web browser to access the additional material. To spare paperback readers from this arduous task, I placed all links in the book on a website: <http://chineseamericanodyssey.webs.com/links>.

My journey has been exciting because of many unexpected experiences and accidental discoveries, evidence that even the best of plans change over the course of research. Many of the lessons I learned should be of interest and value to aspiring nonfiction writers on many other topics who may not know what lies ahead for them.

Without the encouragement, advice, and support of many friends, family, and colleagues, I would not have managed to take this journey. I owe special thanks to historians Xiaolan Bao, Sylvia Sun Minnick, Judy Yung, Mel Brown, Greg Robinson, and Yong Chen and to psychologists Ronald Gallimore, Rod Wong, Paul Rosenblatt, Stanley Sue, and Kay Deaux. Thanks to Phyllis for her patience and indulgence in supporting my many hours spent on this odyssey, at home and on the road.

The expert editorial guidance of Mike Revzin and Marina Bang greatly improved the readability and clarity of the book. I am also appreciative of the graphic skills and artistic talent of Marina Bang who gave generously of her time in the creation and development of the compelling book cover.

JJ
Cypress, California
November 2014

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1 The Journey Begins

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Lao Tzu (604 BC - 531 BC)

To say that my life after retiring from more than 40 years as a professor of psychology has been a surprise to me is an understatement. Until retirement I had never considered researching, let alone, writing about the history of Chinese in America.

My new venture was especially improbable because my personal identification as a Chinese American was not a strong one, partly because my contact with Chinese people had been minimal during most of my life, especially in my youth. Our family was the only Chinese one in the entire city of Macon, Georgia, where my immigrant parents from China came in the 1920s and earned a living running a laundry until the early 1950s.

Growing up under such extreme cultural isolation in a time and place when Jim Crow segregation¹ was still unchallenged in the Deep South, I first experienced uncertainty, then confusion, and eventually conflict in thinking about myself as a Chinese. At a superficial level, I knew I was *Chinese* because my immigrant parents were not fluent in English so my first language was Chinese. My mother reminded me incessantly that we were Chinese, and not the same as whites. She was doubtless motivated by a concern to prepare us for prejudicial treatment we could expect to receive from whites and blacks. She formed such expectations from her own experience receiving racial taunts such as "Chinese eat rats" from children on the street. Even if she never mentioned it, since everyone else in Macon was either white or black, I was quite aware that we were different or in other words, Chinese. Growing up in this situation, we were often treated as exotic or at least foreign.

Mother was especially bitter about the immigration barriers to Chinese imposed by exclusionary laws against Chinese, which were in place in one form or another from the mid-1800s to 1965. She told us that she and my father, like many other Chinese

immigrants, had to resort to purchasing false papers to gain entry to the United States. I felt conflicted knowing that due to the unfair laws against Chinese, my parents had circumvented this barrier by using false identities. She also described the physical and mental ordeal that she suffered when detained and interrogated at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay - the West Coast equivalent of Ellis Island - when she immigrated in 1928. I was shocked to learn of this mistreatment of Chinese immigrants and I was upset and angry about what my parents had experienced. These discoveries made me reluctant at times to want to think of myself as Chinese.



Jung family, 1946: Mary, John, mother Grace, Eugenia, father Frank, George.

When my two sisters, brother, and I approached our adolescent years, my parents began to plan for our future, which they felt was not good for us in the South. In the late 1940s, they decided it was time to move the family, in stages, to San Francisco, where we could escape our cultural isolation. They felt their children would become more “Chinese” once we were living in a Chinese community.

I recall being reluctant to leave Macon, because it was the only place I had lived in and I could not imagine what it would be like to live in a large city clear across the country. Once we arrived in San Francisco, or *Dai Fow* (Big City) as Chinese called it because of its large Chinese community, I found my new life to be exciting and challenging. Overnight, we went from being the only Chinese in town to being just one of thousands – and many adjustments had to be made.

Talk about culture shock! Coming from Georgia and foods such as southern fried chicken, black-eyed peas, grits, and corn bread, what was I to make of egg rolls, chow mein, won ton, dim sum, tofu, and bird's nest soup - none of which I had ever tasted in Macon where the only place I could get Chinese food was from my mother's wok. I was similarly unacquainted with many other aspects of Chinese customs and traditions such as yin and yang, Chinese New Year parades, kung fu, tai chi, feng shui, and mahjong. I had a lot to learn about being Chinese.

I was curious and interested to meet other Chinese of my age. I soon had cordial and friendly interactions with my numerous newfound Chinese American peers in San Francisco, but it did not take long for me to conclude that I was not as *Chinese* as they were. I did not immediately embrace being Chinese. I was not familiar with most Chinese customs and attitudes. I was an outsider to the Chinese community whereas my Chinese American peers had all grown up with social networks consisting almost entirely of other Chinese. My limited ability to speak and understand Chinese also made me uncomfortable.

It seemed to me that my Chinese schoolmates preferred to hang out only with cliques of other Chinese, and avoided socializing with non-Chinese. This separation was probably due in part to the longstanding racial barriers in California between Chinese and whites, which still existed to some extent. I found this low social contact of Chinese with whites somewhat abnormal at first because after all, I had attended all-white schools in Georgia. But in San Francisco, I soon fell in line with the norms and I socialized mostly with other Chinese at school and made little effort to mingle with non-Chinese students.

During my high school and college years, although I developed cordial friendships with Chinese peers in a historic

Chinatown community center, Cameron House,² and the First Presbyterian Chinese Church, I always felt I was not “as Chinese” as they were. After finishing my undergraduate college studies, my contact with Chinese people soon declined drastically. I left San Francisco to attend graduate school at Northwestern University in Evanston, a well-to-do predominately white suburb of Chicago with a student body that was mainly white. After completing my Ph.D. studies, I continued to find myself in a mostly white world as I taught psychology for several decades at Long Beach State, with three years at York University in Toronto, sandwiched in during the mid-1960s. During most of these years there were few Chinese students, other than international students, at either university. Consequently, my Chinese identity that had started to develop during my high school and college years in the San Francisco Bay Area deteriorated, and continued to be minimal at best for many years.

By the time I was 30, and yet unmarried with no prospects in view, I felt parental pressure. A major reason for not marrying was the expectation that I would marry a Chinese. I understood why my parents felt this way, and I did not object, but the reality was that I did not have much opportunity to meet and date Chinese women. Furthermore, the demands of my academic career became my primary concern, further limiting my time and effort to search for a prospective Chinese bride.

Like many children of Chinese, as well as other immigrants, I was conflicted between embracing the culture of my parents and that of mainstream white America. Wanting to fit in and assimilate with the dominant culture, I questioned, or even rejected, some of the values and customs of my immigrant parents. The prejudices and discriminatory barriers against Chinese by white America generated my feelings of inferiority as someone of Chinese descent. Sometimes I experienced embarrassment, and at other times resentment, over being “different.” These reactions made me feel victimized. Why me? Why did I have to be a child of immigrants? Why did I have to be Chinese? Well, not as Chinese as my parents, but I did not want to be even Chinese-American. In that era, children of immigrants were labeled as “hyphenated-Americans” Although blatant anti-Chinese feelings have diminished over recent decades, my ambivalence, if not outright rejection of a Chinese

identify when I was growing up stemmed from society's bias in favor of white America. Accounts of American history, until the civil rights activism of the late 1960s, had been for the most part a history of white American men. The place of Chinese, as well as other Asian immigrants, had been largely ignored. Inclusion of coverage of the contributions and achievements of Chinese to American society would have helped instill in me a greater acceptance of my Chinese self.

Around 2005, as I was preparing to retire from a long academic career as a psychologist who taught and researched the psychology of alcohol use, I began to think about writing a memoir about our family experiences living in Georgia as the only Chinese in our town for many years before we moved to San Francisco to be in a Chinese community. As a young adult, I never thought this story would be of much interest, even though over the years many acquaintances had expressed surprise, curiosity, and interest in learning more about what life was like for us in Georgia and subsequently in San Francisco. However, being someone who is a private person, I was not comfortable with the thought of making our family story public. I also had real doubts whether I could write such a book, which called for a different mindset and skills from those I used in writing psychology textbooks.

My memoir, *Southern Fried Rice: Life in A Chinese Laundry in the Deep South*, fortunately was well received. Writing the book gave me personal satisfaction in paying tribute to my parents for enduring their lives of hardship and isolation in the South. They did not live to know about the book; indeed, I know I could not have written it while they were alive because they would have objected strenuously. During the process of researching and writing it, I discovered so much information about the difficult lives of other Chinese who had run laundries throughout North America that I felt the urge to write another book to honor them -- *Chinese Laundries: Tickets to Survival on Gold Mountain*.

Writing these two books about the lives of Chinese laundrymen and their families led me down a new path as I received, quite by chance, several opportunities to speak across the country. These events allowed me to meet many Chinese who either had owned or worked in laundries, knew someone who had a laundry, or grew up and worked in a family-run laundry. These