

Portraits of Pride II

Chinese-American Legacies—First 160 Years in America

美華之光



Chinese Historical Society
of Southern California

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E-mail: popchssc@yahoo.com

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Randall Bloch: Lead Editor

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Prologue

Railroad magnate Charles Crocker recalled the courage and integrity of the Chinese railroad worker, declaring “Without Chinese labor we would be thrown back in all branches of industries, farming, mining, reclaiming lands and everything else.” (*The Asian American Almanac*: “Who are the Chinese?” p. 47.)

Skillful, Daring and Hardworking Railroad Workers

Chinese immigrants worked on the most difficult and dangerous western section of the Transcontinental Railroad when few others would take on the risk. It is estimated 2,000 died on the job. Their work was a pivotal part of the most important infrastructure project in the United States at that time. At the Promontory Point ceremony when the east coast and the west coast were connected in 1869, the work of Chinese immigrants was not mentioned and no Chinese immigrant was present.

The east/west railroad connection made many people exceedingly rich with money and land grants. Among them were the Big Four railroad magnates: Charles Crocker, Mark Hopkins, Collis Huntington and Leland Stanford.

Agricultural and Land-claiming Experts

The Chinese brought their agricultural expertise from their homeland to convert the turtle swamps of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta into the richest farmland in California. Since Chinese immigrants were forbidden to own land, they helped many white landowners prosper, and their own contributions and horticultural skills have gone mostly unrecorded.

With the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, California farm products were able to ship to the eastern seaboard year-round.

Pioneers in the Commercial Fishing Industry

The first fishing Chinese families settled in the Monterey area in the 1850s, crossing the ocean in two boats sailing from China’s Guangdong Province. The stories of the Chinese who pioneered commercial fishing, and who made enormous contributions to the economy of the Pacific West in the late 1800s and early 1900s, is largely unknown and untold. In time, Chinese immigrants established fishing camps from the Oregon border to Baja California and along the Sacramento Delta. Their catches were dried and shipped to China, Chinese communities, and local markets.

Men and Women of Science and Engineering

According to U. S. Census reports, in 2000 less than 1% of the U.S. population was Chinese-American.

During the 1930-50s, some of the best Chinese scientific brainpower came to America, doing high security research for the United States. Many were involved in the top secret Manhattan project. The McCarthy era communism scare forced most of them to return to China where their know-how brought China up to speed in the nuclear and missile fields. The Christopher Cox Commission Report of the 105th Congress failed to mention this gift of U.S. high technology brainpower to China.

The second generation of engineering students came from Hong Kong and Taiwan. They were very important contributors to our nation’s defense and space exploration.

Departments of science and engineering in our nation's top universities have an overwhelming proportion of Chinese Americans in the ranks of their professors and researchers.

Outstanding, World-changing Individual Achievements

Some of these are widely known "Superstars," while many "Unsung Heroes" are known only in their own fields.

Dr. An Wang, founder of Fortune 500 company Wang Laboratories, wrote in his book *Lessons*, "I founded Wang Laboratories to show Chinese could excel at things other than laundries and restaurants." Was he being too boastful?

Following are some of the individual, world-changing achievement stories in this book:

- ♦ Dr. Charles Kao's developments in fiber optics which transformed global communications and enabled the Internet.
- ♦ Dr. M.C. Chang who is considered the "Father of In Vitro Fertilization," and co-inventor of the first oral birth control pill.
- ♦ Dr. David Wong's research to create the most prescribed antidepressant drug, Prozac, and others.
- ♦ Dr. H.S. Tsien's summation of the "Jet Propulsion Bible" and his pioneer concept of Dyna-Soar that combined aerodynamics and space research.
- ♦ Dr. Flossie Wong-Staal's research work to discover the HIV virus and the mapping of its genetic structure.
- ♦ James Wong Howe's award-winning cinematography when minorities were not welcome in the craft unions.
- ♦ Yo-Yo Ma, the traveling UN "Ambassador with a Cello."
- ♦ Iris Chang, writer/historian, bringing forth to the world the "forgotten holocaust" of the Japanese military's atrocities in China during WW II.

In a project of this magnitude, any errors or omissions will strictly be the responsibility of the volunteer Project Director and Editor. Selections of portraits in this book are based on the merits of the achievements and their impact on the United States and the world.

To acquire one or more copies of *Portraits of Pride II: Chinese-American Legacies—First One Hundred Sixty Years in America*, please contact the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California at 415 Bernard St., Los Angeles, CA 90012-1703. Voice: 323-222-1918; email: popchssc@yahoo.com; web: www.chssc.org.

L.P. Leung

Project Director and Editor-in-Chief

FREE LIBRARY-BOOK PROGRAM

Mission Statement of the
Chinese Historical Society of Southern California:
*“To increase awareness of Chinese American heritage
through public programs, education and research.”*

This second Portraits of Pride book is our effort to research and record the Chinese American legacy over the last 160 years. Our free to libraries distribution program will ensure that Portraits of Pride will be on the shelves of our nation’s libraries and that this legacy will not be forgotten.

The Portraits of Pride project is proud of its past and future financial sponsors in allowing the book to be distributed free to libraries and learning institutions. To date, over 7,000 copies of Portraits of Pride I have been donated to public, school, and college libraries across the United States.

Through the generous contributions of our supporters, we plan to distribute 20,000 copies of this book, *Portraits of Pride II: Chinese-American Legacies—First One Hundred Sixty Years in America*, to libraries throughout America.

Your interest and support of our programs are greatly appreciated. Donations of any amount are welcome.

Thank you.

Chinese Historical Society of Southern California
Portraits of Pride—Free Library Book Program
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Los Angeles, CA 90012-1703
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Acknowledgments

by L.P. Leung, Project Director

It took more than a year to research and conceptualize the theme of this book, and over two more to recruit volunteers to write the portraits, secure rights to the photographs, edit, and put the book together. And now, *Portraits of Pride II: Chinese-American Legacies—First One Hundred Sixty Years in America* is complete.

Not being a historian or a writer but a retired CPA, I sometimes questioned myself as to how I could be entrusted with such an important project. During the process, I wondered how the final version could be written to convey a positive message, even though Chinese Americans had been treated so harshly and regarded with such low esteem. Throughout this journey, I felt a sense of pride as well as excitement, passion, and an awesome responsibility. It has been a most challenging, rewarding and worthwhile task. I am very proud to have had a part in this endeavor.

There are thousands of Chinese Americans who in the last one hundred and sixty years made lasting contributions to the United States and to the world. It is our goal to re-dedicate and record their accomplishments for future generations before these contributions are totally forgotten. We are aware that this volume cannot be inclusive of all deserving individuals. For that, I offer my sincere apology. Perhaps someone will prepare an even more inclusive follow-up in the near future.

For their support throughout these three-plus years, I owe a special debt of gratitude to the following:

- Dr. Wing Mar and his wife Joyce for their faith in the project and their unfailing support at difficult times.
- Margie Lew, charter member of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, for her constant encouragement and support for the project. (Lew was the first editor of the Society's monthly newsletter, *News 'n Notes*, and the biannual edition of the *Gum Saan Journal*).
- Bobbi Leung, my wife, who put up with my sometimes somber mood swings and helped correct my Chinese-English.
- Edgar Wong, for his support, counsel, and lessons learned from *Portraits of Pride Book I*.
- Marian Chew, with the guidance of Jason Jem, for her artistic and professional layout of the finished product.
- The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California for giving this project the freedom to do its work.

I am grateful for the valuable input and participation of the families and friends of many of those we are honoring, which made the stories even more personal and special.

The core team members of *Portraits of Pride Book II* include several from the *Book 1* project, and new members. Their experience and ideas have helped contribute greatly to the completion of this project. They are Wing and Joyce Mar, Gordon Hom, Pete Chinn, Bill Chew, Edgar Wong, Dong Kingman, Jr., Jack Ong, Jason Jem, Randy Bloch, Marian Chew and Yvonne Chang.

We thank all the volunteer writers whose names are listed with each of their portraits. We convey our appreciation to the editors of *Caltech News* for permission to reprint the article on Dr. H. S. Tsien, pioneering rocket scientist; the Royal Swedish

Academy of Sciences and Mrs. Gwen Kao for permission to use Mrs. Kao's Nobel Prize acceptance speech delivered on behalf of Dr. Charles Kao; and to the *Chinese American Forum* for permission to reprint Dr. James Wei's article sharing his experience of "Making It in America."

Special thanks to Randy Bloch who did extensive research and wrote a number of portraits, and for his efforts to secure rights to a number of photographs; to Maureen Bloch who helped proofread many of the edited portraits; to Yvonne Chang who updated the appendix of historical material and created the book's index; and to Pete Chinn who came up with an appropriate four-character Chinese name for the book.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the magnificent and tireless fundraising efforts of Dr. Wing Mar. There is no one more dedicated to the Portraits of Pride project than him.

With pride, we dedicate this book to:

I. The Individuals and Groups in our Portraits;

II. The Founders and Charter Members of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California—their vision for Chinese-American history inspired the work in this book and also the first book in the Portraits of Pride series; and lastly

III. I dedicate this volume to the memory of my son, Timothy Scott Leung. His untimely passing at age 42 in March 2010 was a reminder of the importance for Chinese Americans of Tim's generation and future generations to learn about the lives of our persevering pioneers. By reading Portraits of Pride I and II, these young people will understand those pioneers' struggles and subsequent successes, and unquestionably be proud of their own Chinese-American heritage.