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Chinatown Chinese: The San Francisco Dialect

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Like any living organism, language is a growing phenomenon; it is not static. Language is always affected by changes in environment and progress, and the Chinese language is no exception. As China became less isolated and more aware of her Western counterparts, her language, along with her culture, underwent significant changes. In the twentieth century, new words such as "Marxism," "existentialism," "atom bomb," etc., inevitably entered the Chinese vocabulary. As a result, some new Chinese words were coined according to the literal meaning of the English terms. For example, existentialism was directly translated into Chinese as 存在主義 (M) *cunzai zhuyi* and atom bomb into 原子彈 (M) *yuanzidan*.[1] Other Western terms, however, were transliterated, such as 邏輯 (M) *luoji* for logic and 馬克斯 (M) *makesi* for Marx. Because of the variety that existed among dialects, the standardization of these transliterations was often made more difficult. (For example, chocolate could be 巧格力 (M) *qiaogeli* or 朱古力 (C) *jyu-gu-lik* and sofa could be 沙發 (M) *shafa* or 梳化 (C) *so-fa*.) Of course, such language exchange is not

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one way, as can be evidenced with English words such as typhoon from the Chinese 颱風 (M) *taifeng* or kowtow from 叩頭 (M) *koutou*.

The Chinese language continued to change when the Chinese began to emigrate and settle in countries around the world. In a different environment, the Chinese often found it necessary to adapt their language to a foreign one, such as English, and also to incorporate new language elements into their own. After many years of language interchange, it was natural that a new language neither purely Chinese nor English would evolve.

An excellent example of such a language formation can be seen in the Chinese spoken in various Chinatowns of the United States. So different is the "Chinatown Chinese" from any Chinese dialect, that a newly-arrived Chinese immigrant might have a difficult time communicating with a Chinese American. (For instance, 綠衣 (CC) *luhk-yi* is a policeman in America, but to a person from Hong Kong or Taiwan, it would be a postman.) One might first assume that such a language gap is dialectal in origin because the majority of the Chinatown Chinese speaks the Toishan dialect, not Putonghua (i.e., "Mandarin") or the Guangzhou dialect (i.e., "Cantonese"). The problem is dialectal only if one recognizes and accepts Chinatown Chinese as one of the many dialects in the Chinese language, an idea which is justifiable. For, in the Chinatown Chinese dialect, it does not matter which dialect one speaks; he can communicate with others in Chinatown as long as he is familiar with the unique terminologies used in the Chinese language of America.

It is not an easy task to study the Chinatown Chinese dialect. The language is continually growing and changing as new waves of educated Chinese immigrants and foreign students enter the United States and add to the language. Unlike these recent Chinese immigrants, the majority of the Chinese who first came to America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were illiterate or semi-literate farmers and laborers from the Toishan area of Guangdong Province in southeast China. Upon facing a modern and industrialized society, they had to improvise on their own to describe the new objects in their environment. There was no systematic or conscious effort to develop this new language; everything was passed down by word-of-mouth. Even at this very moment, one term might be

in the process of being eliminated from the vocabulary, while another might emerge to replace it or to conform to a change in the environment. Hence the Chinatown Chinese vocabulary is forever in flux.

In order to better understand the Chinatown language, one must examine some of the factors that make it both so dynamic and at times inconsistent. These factors include such elements as the particular locale of the Chinatown; the general time period; the generation of Chinese; a person's community of friends and associates; one's Chinese language background (Cantonese or Toishan); and amount of formal education and exposure to the English language.

Locale: Of the many Chinese communities in the Western hemisphere, the more well-known ones are in San Francisco and New York City in America, and in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Needless to say, each Chinatown environment has developed its own distinct flavor and local idioms. For example, foods such as barbecued pork buns are called 叉燒飽 (CC) *ta-siu-baau* in many Chinatowns, but in Seattle, they are more commonly known as 咸飽 (CC) *haahm-baau*. Thus, not only is Chinatown Chinese a general dialect, but it can be further subdivided according to locale.

Time period and generation: As mentioned above, the early Chinese immigrants were less educated and less Westernized than the recent Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong or Taiwan who come from more urban, industrialized centers. Consequently, the language of the 1970s and 80s is adopted from and is closer to that of the standardized Hong Kong and Taiwan expressions which have slowly infiltrated the impromptu vocabulary of the older Chinatown Chinese. For example, due to the large number of new Hong Kong Cantonese immigrants from the late sixties on, many Toishan Chinatown expressions are slowly being replaced by Cantonese ones (e.g., to eat is now 食飯 (C) *sihk-faahn* instead of 吃餐 (T) *hyat-taan* and to drive is now 揸車 (C) *ja-che* or 駛車 (C) *sai-che* instead of 放車 (T) *fong-che*). In addition, as the older generations die, many early Chinatown nicknames and idioms have become obsolete for the younger generation (e.g., a San Francisco department store named The Emporium is known as

十八國 (CC) *sihp-baat-gok* or "Eighteen Nations" but not knowing the origins of the store, new immigrants know it as the "Big E").

Chinese language background: Depending on whether one's background is Cantonese or Toishan, terms for the same object may differ. For example, vacuum cleaner is 吸塵機 (C) *kap-chahn gei* and refrigerator is 雪櫃 (C) *syut-gwai*, but for a Chinatown Toishan speaker not exposed to Hong Kong Cantonese, the terms would be 吮塵偈 (T) *dyut-chihn gaai* and 霜櫃 (T) *song-guih* respectively. In many cases, such Toishan expressions are preferred over Cantonese ones, even by Cantonese speakers in Chinatown.

Formal education: A more educated Chinese might translate apartment in its more standard Chinese form 公寓 (M) *gongyu* or (C) *gung-yu*. However, for the less formally educated person, many urban and scientific terms might not be familiar. He would resort to new or transliterated terms such as 柏文 (CC) *paak-muhn* for apartment.

Exposure to English: The more a person is exposed to the English language, the more likely he would use transliterated terms such as 夫列 (CC) *fu-laat* for flat and 市的 (CC) *sih-dik* for steak. A person with less English contact or a newcomer to the United States might say 踏樓 (C) *daaph-lau* or 牛扒/排 (C) *ngauh-pa* (M) *niupai* respectively. In some cases the idiom of a person more familiar with English would reflect the English word itself, like (CC) *ti-wi* for TV (television).

Community of friends and associates: A person's group of friends and associates may vary according to the generation, class, and education. For example, a Cantonese speaker mixing with Toishan workers might pick up a few Toishan words and vice versa. Further, a person not familiar with English may likely incorporate some transliterated terms into his own vocabulary from a Westernized friend. In Chinatown Chinese, depending on one's circle of friends, to see a movie, a common activity, can be said in the following various ways: 睇畫

(T) *hai wa;* 睇戲 (C) *tai hei;* 睇 *mu-fi* (CC) *hai mu-fi* ("movie"); or 睇映畫 (CC) *hai ying-wa.*

The following glossary provides an introduction and sampling of Chinatown Chinese. It is divided into five sections: (1) transliterated terms, (2) partially transliterated terms, (3) translated terms, (4) new terms, and (5) special San Francisco terms. The vocabulary is taken from the working class people of San Francisco Chinatown, including all ages and both sexes. However, it is limited to the pre-1970 period, before the National Origins Quota System was abolished. This eliminates the influence of the more educated and Westernized Chinese immigrants whose language contribution to today's Chinatown Chinese is from abroad and is not a product of living in America. The transcription used for the characters follows the Toishan dialect because that is the main one spoken by the Chinese living in America. However, one must also be aware that even the Toishan dialect has its variations (e.g., between city and country dwellers, or between northern and southern Toishan speakers) and that the pronunciations can even differ among Toishan speakers depending on their home villages.[2] Hence, the phonetic Chinatown Chinese transcriptions used here are actually composites of basic Toishan pronunciations that are commonly used and understood in Chinatown. In addition, it should be noted that since Chinatown Chinese is influenced not only by the Chinese dialects but also by English, there will be times when terms defy written characters (e.g., (CC) *ti-wi* for "TV"). And, there will be some cases in which a transliteration is a combination of Toishan and Cantonese (e.g., the street "Stockton" is often pronounced 士德頓 (CC) *sih-dak-duhn*) in order to obtain a pronunciation closer to the English.

How English affects the grammar and structure of Chinatown Chinese should not be neglected. But since such changes vary with the degree of one's exposure to English, they are extremely inconsistent and are a matter of individual idiosyncrasy. Therefore, this aspect of the language will not be dealt with here. In any case, it is hoped that this glossary can provide insight on a heretofore ignored language product of America which should be ranked both as a new dialect of the Chinese language and as an American ethnic dialect: Chinatown Chinese.[3]

1. Transliterated Terms

Chinatown
~~Chinese~~ transliterations are borrowed from standard Chinese transliterations, e.g.: 沙文治 (M) *shawenzhi* (C) *sa-mahn-jih* for "sandwich," 巴士 (M) *bashi* (C) *ba-si* for "bus," 的士高 (M) *dishigao* (C) *dik-sih-gou* for "disco," 紐約 (M) *niuyue* (C) *nau-yeuk* for "New York," 福特 (M) *fute* (C) *fuk-dahk* for "Ford," etc. However, Chinatown Chinese does not always follow standardized forms, especially with some proper names: "Los Angeles" is 羅省 (CC) *loh-saang*, not 洛杉機(M) *luoshanji* (C) *lohk-chaam-gei*; "Seattle" is 舍路 (CC) *se-luh*, not 西雅圖 (M) xiyatu (C) *sai-ngah-touh*; "Detroit" is 積彩 (CC) *dik-toi*, not 底特律 (M) *diteli* (C) *daai-dahk-leut*; "Nixon" is 尼遜 (CC) *nik-seun*, not 尼克遜 (M) *nikesun* (C) *neih-haak-seun*; etc. Since the former case is not an American-based creation, examples from it will not be listed here. For convenience, terms in this section have been divided into: (A) place names, (B) San Francisco street names, (C) food terms, and (D) miscellaneous terms.

A. Place Names

Angel Island	*yin-ji ai-luhn*	煙治埃崙
Detroit	*dik-toi*	積彩
downtown	*dang-tang*	- -
Fleishhacker Zoo	*fu-li-sak-kah su*	- -
Los Angeles	*loh-saang*	羅省
Oakland	*uk-luhn*	屋崙
Reno	*li-noh*	李糯
Richmond (district)	*li-jih-muhn (kui)*	烈治文(區)
Seattle	*se-luh*	舍路

B. San Francisco Street Names

Beckett	*bik-giht*	碧杰
Broadway	*bu-luiht-wui*	布律威
California	*ga-la-fun*	加嫏寬
Clay	*kih-li*	企李
Columbus	*go-luhn-bu*	哥倫布
Commercial	*kaam-mi-sen*	岑尾善
	or *kim-mi-sin*	衿尾慎
Duncombe	*daang-gim*	登錦
Dupont	see Grant Avenue	
Filbert	*fi-baaht*	菲拔
Grant (formerly Dupont)	*du-baan*	都板
Green	*gu-lin*	固連
Hyde	*haai*	鎪
Jackson	*dik-sihn*	積臣
Kearny	*kin-nih*	乾尼
Lombard	*lihm-baat*	林拔
Market	*ma-giht*	孖結
Mason	*mi-sin*	美慎
Montgomery	*maahng-gim*	孟金
Pacific	*paah-si-wihk*	栢思域

Pine	*baan*	板
Powell	*paau-wah*	跑華
Sacramento	*sa-ga-min-du*	沙加緬度
Stockton	*sih-dak-duhn*	士德頓
Union	*yu-yihn*	大宴
Vallejo	*wui-li-hoh*	奎利賀
Washington	*wah-sihng-duhn*	華盛頓
Wentworth	*ak-woh*	德和

C. Food Terms

butter	*bud-da*	- -
cake	*kik*	- -
cereal (from "mush")	*ma-sih*	- -
cupcake	*kaap-kik*	- -
Denver sandwich	*daan-wah sa-muhn-ji*	丹華沙文治
doughnut	*do-na*	多那
hamburger	*haam-buk-gah*	坎卜架
hamburger steak	*haam-buk-gah sih-dik*	坎卜架市的
ice cream	*ai-sih ki-lim*	- -
lunch	*laan-jih*	嚂治
mush	see cereal	

omelette	*aam-luiht*	庵律
rib steak	*lip sih-dik*	粒市的
steak	*sih-dik*	市的
stew	*sih-du*	市都
sundae	*sin-di*	申的
tenderloin steak	*ten-da-laahn sih-dik*	聽打蘭市的

D. Miscellaneous Terms

all the same	*o loh sim*	- -
apartment	*paak-muhn*	栢文
avenue	*a-wuhn-yiuh*	亞運由
big shot	*bik sot*	- -
busboy	*bā-sih-boi*	巴市杯
day off	*dei o-fuh*	- -
dollar	*da-lah*	- -
flat	*fu-laat*	夫烈
gas; gasoline	*ge-sih*	- -
Indian (Native American)	*yin-chihn*	因陳
July 4th	*jiu-lai fo-fuh*	- -
market	*ma-giht*	孖結
monkey wrench	*maang-ga laan-dih*	- -

to move	*nui-fuh*	– –
no savvy	*no sa-be*	– –
nurse (also a translation)	*nui-ti*	女侍
office	*o-fuht-sih*	柯佛市
picnic	*pik-nihk*	– –
porch	*bo-dih*	– –
size	*saai-sih*	– –
stupid	*sih-du-biht*	– –
taxes; taxi	*tek-sih*	– –
ticket	*tik-git*	– –
too much	*tu maat-jih*	– –
TV (television)	*ti-wi*	– –
vacation	*wihk-ki-sihn*	域企臣
yard	*ya*	– –
young man	*yung man*	– –

2. Partially Transliterated Terms

With the acceptance of many American terms into the Chinatown Chinese vocabulary, it is only natural that these terms would also function like regular Chinese words. Another result is the formation of partially transliterated terms, part of which are in Chinese and a part in English. In this section, and hereafter, those English terms transliterated into Chinese are italicized. The following are a few such examples:

back*yard*	*mi-ya*	尾*ya*

beef *stew*	*ngauh sih-du*	牛市都
cable *car*	*ding-dong ka* or	叮噹卡
	dong-dong ka	噹噹卡
clubhouse *sandwich*	*wuih-so sa-muhn-jih*	會所沙文治
color *TV*	*ngahn-sik ti-wi*	顏色 *ti-wi*
to *dance* (lit: to leap a *dance*)	*hiuh dcan-sihng*	跳旦綳
frying *pan*	*dyan baan*	煎 *baan*
gas stove	*ge-sih luh*	*ge-sih* 爐
lamb *stew*	*yeng sih-du*	羊市都
nylon stockings	*naai-laan maaht*	*naai-laan* 襪
street*car*	*gaai ka*	街卡
street *fair* (carnival)	*gaaih fe*	街*fe*

There is another interesting group of partially transliterated examples. All of these are actually fully transliterated except that in addition they are modified by Chinese terms which either repeat or describe what they are:

bank (*bank* + house)	*beng-fohng*	*beng* 房
buffet (*buffet* + meal)	*bu-fi-taan*	布腓餐
can (*can* + Chinese noun suffix)	*kin-hauh*	*kin* 頸
kid (*kid* + Chinese noun diminutive)	*kit-doi*	*kit* 仔

pear (*pear* + fruit)	*pe-go*	*pe* 梨
peas (*pea* + pea)	*pi-au*	*pi* 豆
toaster (*toast* + stove)	*tu-sih-luh*	多士爐

3. Translated Terms

This section is self-explanatory; e.g., "freeway" is 自由路 (CC) *dih-yiuh-luh* (lit: free road). (A newcomer to the States might mistakenly read this term to mean "the road to freedom.") A few other examples are listed below under (A) place names, (B) holidays, and (C) food terms.

A. Place Names

Fisherman's Wharf	*nguih-ngihn mah-hauh*	漁人碼頭
Seal Rock	*hoi-gau saan*	海狗山
Sunset District	*ngiht-lohk kui*	日落區
Telegraph Hill	*ehn-bou saan*	電報山

B. Holidays

Christmas (lit: birth of Jesus)	*yeh-su aan*	耶穌誕
Labor Day (lit: laborers' day)	*gung-ngihn ngiht*	工人日
Memorial Day (lit: deceased soldiers' day)	*mohng-bing ngiht*	亡兵日
Veteran's Day (lit: soldiers' day)	*gwun-ngihn ngiht*	軍人日

C. Food Terms

bacon and eggs	*yan-nguhk aan*	煙肉蛋
chicken a la king (lit: chicken king)	*gaai-wohng*	鷄皇
French toast	*hong faat-laahn- sai mihn-baau*	炕法蘭西麵飽
hash-brown potatoes	*dyan suh-doi-lip*	煎薯仔粒
strawberry (lit: ground fruit)	*ei-go*	地菓

4. New Terms

New terms are those that are created out of the Chinese American experience. In other words, these terms emerged in the speeches of the Chinese Americans as a result of living in America. It should also be noted that many of these words derive from the Toishan dialect. This section has examples from various aspects of the Chinese American life: (A) place names, (B) holidays, (C) immigration terms, (D) food terms, (E) household terms, (F) employment terms, (G) terms used for various occupations and businesses, (H) derogatory terms, and (I) miscellaneous terms.

A. Place Names

America (lit: flowery flag, referring to the American flag)	*fa-kih*	花旗
America (lit: gold mountain)	*gim-saan*	金山
China (lit: mountain of the Tang)	*hohng-saan*	唐山
Chinatown	*hohng-ngihn-fyauh*	唐人埠
Mexico/the Philippines	*luih-fung*	呂宋

Sacramento *ngih-fyauh* 二埠
(lit: second town)

Stockton *saam-fyauh* 三埠
(lit: third town)

Vancouver *haahm-sui-fyauh* 鹹水埠
(lit: saltwater town)

B. Holidays

Christmas *faan-ngihn ung* 番人冬
(lit: foreign winter); so-called because Christmas is usually around the time of the Chinese winter solstice

Christmas tree *go-ung sih* 過冬樹
(lit: a tree celebrating the winter solstice)

Easter *gaaih-aahn ngiht* 鷄蛋日
(lit: egg day)

Easter *hu-doi ngiht* 兔仔日
(lit: rabbit day)

Halloween *gui ngiht* 鬼日
(lit: ghost/devil day)

holiday *aih-ngiht-ji* 大日子
(lit: a big day)

Thanksgiving *fo-gaai ngiht* 火鷄日
(lit: turkey day)

C. Immigration Terms

alien registration card *luhk-kaat* 綠咭
(lit: green card, referring to its color)

to be "busted" *baau ji* 爆紙
during an immigration interrogation for "lying" (lit: exploded paper)

~~lying (lit: exploded paper)~~

to buy papers *maaih ji* 買紙
that would enable one to come to America under false pretenses

to change one's *goi ji* 改紙
legal papers
a procedure of the 1950s Confession Program in which a person changes his false papers

citizenship certificate *ji-mi* 紙尾
(lit: a paper stub, referring to the portion kept)

to confess *haan-baahk* 坦白
referring to the Confession Program of the 1950s in which Chinese could confess to their false papers in order to live in America permanently under their true identities

a "fact sheet" *hau-gung* 口供
(lit: a deposition), referring to a list of questions and answers used during an immigration interrogation; sent by a Chinese living in America to someone living in China who wants to come to America. The latter must memorize the sheet so that the two parties do not contradict each other during their separate interrogations.

false papers *ga-ji* 假紙
used by some Chinese immigrants to claim U.S. connection in order to come to America; a.k.a. "paper sons"

to file a petition *baahn ji* 辦紙
for immigration to America

to sell papers *maaih ji* 賣紙
that would enable one to come to America under false pretenses

wooden barracks *muhk-uk* 木屋
referring specifically to the Angel Island Detention Center from 1900-1940

D. Food Terms

aspirin (for headaches)	*hauh-tiek yuohn*	頭 *tiek* 丸
aspirin (for stomach-aches)	*u-tiek yuohn*	肚 *tiek* 丸
frozen chicken (lit: refrigerator chicken)	*song-guih gaai*	霜櫃鷄
gravy (lit: paste water)	*wuh-sui*	糊水
potato chips	*sih-doi faih*	薯仔塊
roast beef (lit: baked cow)	*guhk-ngauh*	焗牛
soft drink (lit: cool water)	*lehng-sui*	涼水
take-out dishes; eaten with rice only	*suhk-suhng*	熟餸
tea pastry equivalent to the Cantonese *dim-sam* 點心	*chah-ngauh*	茶餚

E. Household Terms

bread box	*myahn-baau ting*	麵飽箱
clothes dryer (lit: machine that bakes clothes)	*guhk-yi gaaih*	焗衣偈
hair dryer (lit: machine that bakes hair)	*guhk-mouh gaaih*	焗毛偈
hair dryer (lit: machine that blows hair)	*chui-mouh gaaih*	吹毛偈

refrigerator (lit: frost box)	*song-guih*	霜櫃
telephone (lit: a line that calls [you]/a line that visits [a friend])	*haam/haàm ten*	喊/探綫
vacuum cleaner (lit: machine that sucks in dust)	*dyut-chihn gaaih*	吮塵偈

F. Terms Used for Various Occupations and Businesses

Banking

bank	*beng-fohng*	*beng* 房
to borrow money from a bank (lit: to give birth to money)	*saang ngahn*	生銀
loan payment by installment	*gung-ngahn kih*	供銀期
barber shop	*dyan-moh pu*	剪毛鋪
domestic cook	*jih-ga-tuih*	住家厨

Farming

farm	*yuohn-hau*	園口
to work on a farm picking fruits, sometimes referring to a summer job for students	*jahk-go*	摘菓

Laundry

laundromat (lit: a cage)	*luhng-doi*	籠仔
laundry (lit: place to wash clothes)	*(tai-)yi gwon*	(洗)衣館

laundry (lit: clothes place)	*yi (-syang) gwon*	衣(裳)館
laundry irons (lit: six pounds, eight pounds, referring to the weights of the irons)	*luhk-bohng, baat-bohng*	六磅, 八磅
office; referring specifically to a small laundry store, usually run by a husband-and-wife team, that collects laundry for a bigger laundry to wash	*o-fuht-sih*	柯佛市
to press clothes with machines	*kaap-yi*	夾衣
a shirt-pressing machine (lit: people machine, so-called because of its shape with two extensions used for pressing the sleeves)	*ngin-doi gaai*	人仔偈

Restaurant

a chef/cook (lit: to cook on a *wok*)	*chau-wohk*	炒鑊
daily special dinner (lit: harmonious dishes)	*woh-toi*	和菜
a restaurant that serves both Chinese and American food	*taan-gwon*	餐館
to run a restaurant (lit: to cook chop suey)	*chau daap-tui*	炒雜碎
tips (lit: flowery profits)	*fa-lih*	花利
waiter (lit: to stand by the table)	*ki-hoih*	企枱
waitress (lit: girl who stands by the table)	*ki-hoih-nui*	企枱女

Sewing Factory

denim (lit: mule cloth; the mule image is taken from the logo of jeans manufacturer, Levi Strauss and Company)	*luih-doi-bu*	騾仔布
female sweat-shop worker	*gaaih-chong poh*	偈廠婆
female sweat-shop worker (lit: woman who sews)	*chaai-yi muh*	躉衣姆
jeans (lit: mule-cloth pants)	*luih-doi-bu fuh*	騾仔布褲
to sew	*chaai-yi*	躉衣
to sew men's clothes (lit: to sew mules)	*chaai luih-doi*	躉騾仔
to sew women's clothes (lit: to sew flowery clothes)	*chaai fa-yi*	躉花衣
sewing factory	*gaaih-chong*	偈廠
sewing machine	*chaai-yi gaaih*	躉衣偈

Stores

curio and souvenir shop (lit: antique shop)	*gu-ung pu*	古董鋪
dime store; sometimes used to refer to Woolworth's	*sihp-fen pu*	十仙鋪
grocery store (lit: a warehouse)	*fo-tong*	貨倉

H. Derogatory Terms

American-born Chinese (lit: a bamboo section); two explanations used to	*juk-sing*	竹升

describe an American-born Chinese as symbolized by a bamboo section: (1) the outside of a bamboo is sturdy and strong but the inside is hollow or (2) a bamboo section is stopped at both ends by knots, hence one cannot get in or out of a bamboo section

American-born Chinese (lit: brainless)	*mo-no*	冇腦
beatnik (lit: a bearded man)	*saang-tu lo*	生鬚佬
beatnik (lit: a bearded man)	*wuh-tuh lo*	鬍鬚佬
a black (lit: a charcoal man)	*haan lo*	炭佬
a black (lit: Old Black Ink)	*lo maahk*	老墨
a black (lit: Mr. Black Ink)	*maahk ki*	墨記
a black (lit: Uncle Black Ink)	*maahk tuk*	墨叔
a black (lit: *wok* bottom)	*wohk-aai*	鑊底
a black (lit: a black ape)	*wuh yuohn*	烏猿
a black (lit: a chimney)	*yan-hung*	煙通
a black prostitute (lit: soy sauce chicken)	*si-yiuh-gaaih*	豉油鷄
a Caucasian (lit: green eye pupil)	*luhk ngaan-wuht*	綠眼核
China-born Chinese boy	*hohng-saan doi*	唐山仔

China bug (China-born Chinese)	*chai-na baak*	- -
the elderly sitting in Chinatown's Portsmouth Square (lit: members of the Senate and the House of Representatives); a satirical reference to the elderly who gossip and criticize while doing nothing but sit in the park all day	*sehng-hah ngi-yuohn*	上下議員
a hippy (lit: a long-hair man)	*chyang-moh (doi)*	長毛
a *Jew* (lit: a *Jewish* devil); also more commonly a referral to a cheap and stingy person	*jiu-gui*	*jiu* 鬼
San Francisco Chinatown Six Companies (lit: rice containers); also used for anyone who does nothing but eat	*faahn-hung*	飯桶
a white Canadian (lit: a red-hair ghost/crook)	*huhng-moh gui/tahk*	紅毛鬼/賊
a white prostitute (lit: a plain steamed chicken)	*baahk-jaam gaai*	白斬鷄

I. Miscellaneous Terms

American ginseng	*fa-kih taam*	花旗參
American money (lit: flowery flag paper)	*fa-kih ji*	花旗紙
American money ~~(lit: flowery flag paper)~~	*fa-kih ngahn*	花旗銀
American school (lit: foreigner's school)	*faan-ngihn si-gwon*	番人書館
basement	*hu-fu-aai*	土庫底

a beauty queen (lit: queen, empress)	*nui-wohng*	女皇
to choose a beauty queen; or a beauty pageant	*tun nui-wohng*	選女皇
to cheat; to take advantage of (lit: to catch a pig)	*jok-ji*	捉豬
Chinese; also "fellow Chinese," a casual greeting from one Chinese to another when both are strangers to each other	*hohng-ngihn*	唐人
Chinese American (lit: product/son of the earth); usually but not always derogatorily used by the older generation for the younger	*hu-ji*	土子
Chinese American (lit: earth paper); interchangeable with the above; "paper" refers to a Chinese American birth certificate which means U.S. citizenship, hence Chinese American	*hu-ji*	土紙
Chinese American (lit: a native head)	*hu-ji hauh*	土子頭
Chinese American boy	*hu-ji doi*	土子仔
Chinese American girl	*hu-ji nui*	土子女
a Chinese meal	*hohng taan*	唐餐
Chinese school; referring to the Chinatown afternoon and evening schools that teach Chinese	*hohng-ngihn si-gwon*	唐人書館
a Christian church of any denomination (lit: a *Jesus* hall)	*yeh-su hohng*	耶穌堂
a cigar (lit: Philippines smoke); not necessarily confined to cigars made in the Philippines	*luih-tung yen*	呂宋煙

a city (lit: a riverside town)	*fyauh*	埠
a clan or district association	*gung-so*	公所
a clubhouse, usually located in basements where men hang out	*aau-hyau*	寶口
to diet (lit: to regulate the stomach)	*jai-u*	制肚
to divorce (lit: to split accounts)	*chak-su*	拆數
to eat	*hyat-taan*	吃餐
a hatchet man of early tong war days	*fu-hauh doi*	斧頭仔
to go to a town from San Francisco	*yihp fyauh (-doi)*	入埠(仔)
to go to another town	*go fyauh*	過埠
an income property, usually an apartment	*yihp-sik lyauh*	入息樓
to marry	*gau-yin*	交姻
a money wreath; presented to and worn on stage by performers whose fans and special interest groups have bills of various denominations sewn to form wreaths of all sizes and shapes; used to lure Chinese performers to come to America	*ngahn-ji paaih*	銀紙牌
a movie	*ying-wah*	映畫
a newcomer to America (lit: new villager)	*tin heng-lih*	新鄉里
old-timers and newcomers (lit: old guest, new guest); an old term first used	*giuh-haak, tin-haak*	舊客, 新客

on boats to differentiate between new immigrants and old-timers; "guest" refers to the fact that the Chinese were not natives of America

a parade	*yiuh-gaaih*	遊街
places outside the Chinatown community (lit: foreign street)	*lo-faan gaaih*	老番街
a policeman (lit: green clothes)	*luhk-yi*	綠衣
police station (lit: house of green clothes)	*luhk-yi fohng*	綠衣房
a quarter (twenty-five cents)	*tyan-baat (-ngahn)*	鐳八(銀)
a small town, city, or suburb	*fyauh-doi*	埠仔
spring banquet, held annually after Chinese New Year by the various clan associations	*chun-yen*	春宴
street blocks; intersection	*gaaih-hau*	街口
telephone operator	*haam-ten nui*	喊綫女
a tong clubhouse	*hohng-hau*	堂口
a Volkswagon bug (lit: turtle shell)	*gui-hohk*	龜殼
a Western-styled meal (lit: foreign meal)	*faan taan*	番餐
a white American (lit: man from the Flowery Flag)	*fa-kih lo*	花旗佬

5. Special San Francisco Terms

This section contains some unique nicknames and sayings which may or may not be familiar to anyone living outside the San Francisco Chinatown community. It should also be noted that most of these examples were popular during the 1940s and 1950s.

A. Nicknames

Chinese Street *hohng-ngihn gaaih* 唐人街
Re: Chinatown or Sacramento Street. When newly-arrived Chinese immigrants got off the boat, the first street they stepped on was Sacramento Street. It was also here where most of the Chinese people first congregated.

Eighteen Nations *sihp-baat gok* 十八國
Re: The Emporium, a downtown department store. The Emporium used to rent out sections of the store to people representing various countries. Goods from a total of eighteen countries were sold.

Fifteen Cents Street *hoh-bun gaaih* 毫半街
Re: Waverly Place. A person used to be able to get a haircut at a barber shop in Waverly Place for only fifteen cents.

First/Big Town *aai-fyauh* 大埠
Re: San Francisco. San Francisco was the first major American city for the Chinese immigrants.

Garden Corner *fa-yuohn-gohk* 花園角
Re: Portsmouth Square. This Chinatown park is so named because it is so small.

Garden Corner Street *fa-yuohn-gohk gaaih* 花園角街
Re: Breham Place. A little alley bordering Portsmouth Square.

Golden Chrysanthemum Garden Alley *gim-guk-yuohn hong* 金菊園巷
Re: Jason Court. Named after the restaurant located here.

Golden Star Lady *gim-ting muh* 金星姆
Re: Mrs. May Chinn Tong, the popular radio announcer of the now defunct Golden Star

Chinese radio station (aired 1939-1976).

Lice Theater *gau-sit hi-yuohn* 狗蝨戲院
Re: Times Theater, on Stockton Street. In the old days, this theater charged ten-cents admission for adults and five-cents for children; it was considered a very cheap place to go to for entertainment. However, every time a person left the theater, he left with an itch.

New Mexico/Philippines Alley *tin luih-tung hong* 新呂宋巷
Re: Spofford Alley. This alley was named after the second store set up in Chinatown that specialized in exporting and importing goods to and from the Philippines and Mexico.

Old Gold Mountain *giuh gim-saan* 舊金山
Re: San Francisco. "Gold Mountain" is a reference to the gold rush days in California. (Note: "New Gold Mountain" is Australia.)

Old Mexico/Philippines Alley *giuh luih-tung hong* 舊呂宋巷
Re: Ross Alley. A store specializing in exporting and importing goods to and from the Philippines and Mexico, was located here. It is called "old" because a newer store engaged in a similar business was established at Spofford Alley.

Temple of the Heavenly Queen Street *hyan-hauh-myau gaaih* 天后廟街
Re: Waverly Place. Named after the temple located in this alley. The Heavenly Queen is the patron saint of seafarers. She was an important goddess for the early Chinese who crossed the Pacific between China and America.

Vernacular *Junior* Street *baahk-wah dyun gaaih* 白話尊街
Re: Beckett Street. Named after an interpreter who worked at the immigration office during the old days. His identity is now unknown, except that he was a white and had "Junior" after his name. "Dyun" is a partial transliteration for "junior."

Wide Street *fuht gaaih* 闊街
Re: Van Ness Avenue. During the 1906 Earthquake, most of the Chinese ran to Van Ness Avenue, believing that the wide street would be safer than the narrow and crowded streets of Chinatown. Van Ness has been known as "Wide Street" ever since.

B. Sayings

1. "Water splashing at the ship's bow."

船頭水響

syuohn-hauh sui heng

Re: The ocean trip to China, depicting a person sleeping at the bow of the ship and listening to the sound of waves on his way home.

2. "*Manion's* coming!"

Min-yin 來啦

min-yin loih la

Re: Inspector Jack Manion (d.1959), the unofficial chief of police of Chinatown and the authoritative figure during the tong wars. This little phrase was used to scare off children who had been naughty.

3. "Cook arrowhead roots for every meal."

餐餐煮茨菇

taan-taan ji si-guh

This is also a transliterated nickname for San Francisco. *"si-guh" (Sagittaria sagittifolia)* is a very popular water plant eaten by Cantonese and Toishan people, and is usually served around Chinese New Year. Since this water plant was very expensive and difficult to obtain in America, it was said that to eat it every day in America would be an almost impossible task. The significance and meaning of this saying is unclear, but we speculate that it is tied to the belief that San Francisco represents a hope for wealth and happiness. Going to San Francisco would be like eating *si-guh* every day (i.e., happy days and happy times will come one day).

4. "Come to America and suffer like a mule."

來金山挨騾仔

loih gim-saan ngaih luih-doi
This bitter statement coined by the many Chinese immigrants is self-explanatory.

5. "Eat more potatoes and go back to China.

吃多 *naai* 薯仔返唐山

hyat o naai sih-doi faahn hohng-saan
This is another bitter statement telling the Chinese to work hard and to eat more potatoes so that they can save enough money to return home. Potatoes is used here to emphasize the fact that potatoes are less expensive than rice, do not taste good, and are a foreign substitute for the Chinese diet.

6. "China boy, how often do you go back and forth? Now that you're back, you break the teacup."

唐山仔,幾久唔來回,回來就打爛個茶杯仔

hohng-saan doi, gi-giu mh loih-wuih, wuih-loih diu a laahn go chah-bui-doi
This is a children's ditty, poking fun at the China-born Chinese for being so shy and nervous in a new environment (i.e., America). Breaking anything is also a bad omen.

Variation: "China boy, how often do you go back and forth? When you do come back, your ass is full of moss."

唐山仔,幾久唔來回,回來屎忽生青苔

hohng-saan doi, gi-giu mh loih-wuih, wuih-loih si-fut saang teng-hoih
Here, the ditty pokes fun at how long the China-born Chinese has been away from home.

7. "Ring, ring, ring. *Gong Cheong Lung* of San Francisco. *No more lice, no more eat. All* will drop *dead.*"

Wuhng, wuhng, wuhng. 大舉廣昌隆. *No mo lai-si, no mo yit, o-loh aap daai-dit.*

Wuhng, wuhng, wuhng. Aai-fyauh gong-tyang-luhng. No mo lai-si, no mo yit, o-loh aap daai-dit.
There are two popular versions to this ditty. The first three words are onomatopoetic, representing the sound of dialing a telephone. Gong Cheong Lung is the name of a San Francisco store that used to be the only Chinese store for the community. One version says when this store was first established, it did not register with the city government and did not obtain a license for business. Someone notified the store about this and upset the manager. In broken English, he hurriedly called City Hall saying the above, which meant, "This is Gong Cheong Lung. We do not have a license. Without it we cannot eat (i.e., make a living) and we will all die." Another version says this ditty was used to poke fun at the Chinese people who lived in small towns away from San Francisco Chinatown and who would become frantic whenever they run out of rice. Since Gong Cheong Lung was the only store where rice could be bought, it was only natural that these people would call the store and in their broken English say, "Gong Cheong Long! We have no more rice and cannot eat, so we will all die." The difference in the two versions is attributed to the word *"lai-si"* which can mean "license" in one story and "rice" in another.

NOTES

1. The Chinese language is divided into many dialects that are further subdivided according to regions or villages. The official language of China is Putonghua (more popularly known as "Mandarin"). However, the main Chinese dialect spoken in Chinese American communities is that of Toishan, which is a subdialect of Guangzhouhua (more popularly known as "Cantonese") and which also has its own subdivisions. The following notations will be used to indicate which dialect is being transcribed: M = Mandarin, C = Cantonese, T = Toishan dialect, and CC = Chinatown Chinese (based on Toishan pronunciations).

2. For more details on the variations within the Toishan dialect see: Tung Yiu, "The T'ai-shan Dialect," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1946; and Chao Yuan-ren, "On the Linguistics Materials of Tai-Shan, Kwangtung" [written in Chinese], *Bulletin of The Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica* 23, pt. 1 (Dec. 1951): 25-76. Although Tung's work is based on New York Chinatown and Chao's on San Francisco Chinatown, they do not deal directly with the unique Chinatown Chinese terminologies.

3. The original research for this paper was done in 1969 for a Chinese linguistics seminar at San Francsico State University. Although it has never been published, it has been privately circulated. Subsequently, other works have touched upon Chinatown Chinese: Huang Xuanfan, "Jiujinshan Huafou Taishan yuliao" [The Toishan Language of San Francisco's Chinatown], *Guangdong wenxian jikan* 1, no. 4 (December 1971): 100; and Kexi, "Mantan Beimei Huaqiao duiyu diming di Zhong yi" [Comments on How Place Names Are Translated into Chinese by the North American Chinese], *Guangdong wenxian jikan* 4, no. 2 (June 1974): 65-66. These works are casual observations made by Chinese travelers in America.

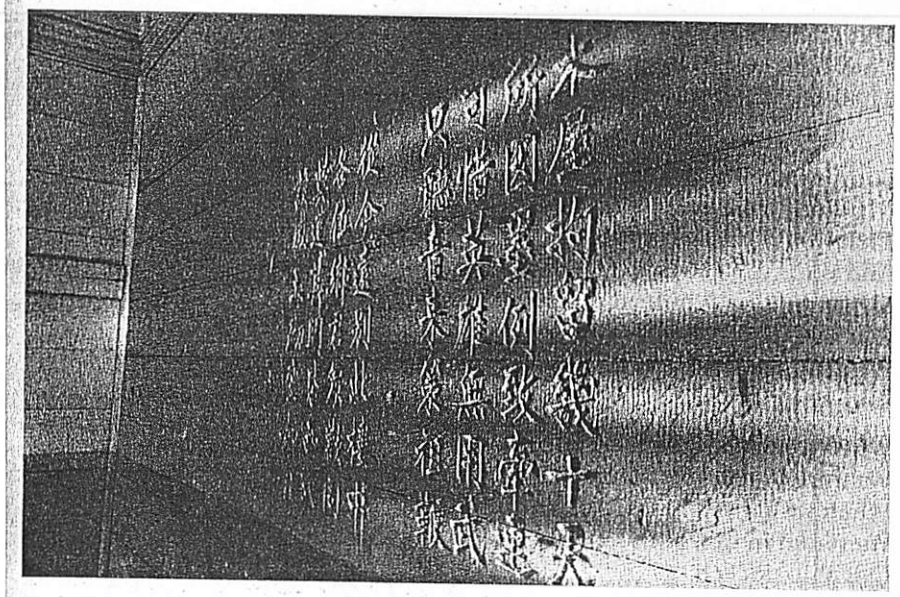
Detention in the Wooden Building (1910)

In 1910 a new immigration station was built at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay expressly to accommodate Chinese and other Asians immigrating to the United States. For the next thirty years, until a fire destroyed the station in 1940, approximately 175,000 Chinese immigrants passed through Angel Island, where they were singled out for long detentions and intense cross-examinations to prove their right to enter the country according to the Chinese Exclusion Act. A number of the Chinese detainees left poems that they wrote or carved into the barrack walls, recording their journey to America, their longing for families back home, and their outrage and humiliation at their mistreatment in the muk-uk *(wooden building).*

The following poem was not written on the barrack walls but sent by a Chinese detainee to the Chinese World *newspaper,[1] where it was published on March 16, 1910. It is the earliest and longest extant poem expressing the Chinese response to their detainment at Angel Island. Similar to other poems that have been found at Angel Island, it was written in the classical style and rich with references to heroic figures who had overcome adversity. Reflecting the strong feelings of Chinese nationalism at the time, the newspaper exhorted its readers to help restore China's wealth and glory and thereby wipe out the humiliation suffered by the Chinese at Angel Island. Interestingly, fifteen lines that advocated the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and restoration of Han Chinese rule were deleted from the poem, most likely because the newspaper supported reform, rather than obliteration, of Qing rule.[2] A year later, the same poem in its entirety*

1. The *Chinese World* newspaper was founded as the weekly *Mon Hing Bo* in 1891. It was given its English name, *Chinese World,* when the Baohuanghui, or Chinese Reform Party, gained control of the newspaper in 1899. It began publishing daily in 1901, and its Chinese name was changed to *Sai Gai Yat Po* in 1908.

2. The Manchus conquered China in 1644 and ruled as the Qing dynasty until they were overthrown by Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Party in 1911.



One of many Chinese poems still visible at Angel Island today. (Photo by Chris Huie)

appeared in the Xinning Magazine, *which was intended for the emigrant community in Taishan District. According to the editor's note at the end of this version, the poem was published to arouse the sympathy and appreciation of the sons of overseas Chinese so that they would not squander their fathers' hard-earned money. There were also minor textual differences between the two versions. We have chosen to translate and reprint the* Xinning *version here.*

My mind often recalls Su Wu who, in maintaining his unyielding
loyalty to the Han Dynasty, would rather endure the biting
snow in the freezing frontier,[3]
And the King of Yue who, in reminding himself to seek revenge
against the State of Wu, would sleep on firewood and lick the
bitter gall bladder.[4]

3. During the Western Han dynasty, Su Wu (140–60 B.C.) was sent by the Chinese government as envoy to the Xiongnu, a nomadic people north of the Chinese empire. Detained there for nineteen years, he refused to renounce his loyalty to the Han emperor.

4. Goujian was king of the state of Yue (in the present province of Zhejiang). In 494 B.C. he was ignominiously defeated by King Fucha's armies from the state of Wu. Two decades later, Yue recovered and returned to defeat Wu. During Yue's recovery period, it was alleged that King Goujian slept on firewood and tasted gall bladder in order not to forget the bitterness and humiliation of his defeat.

Our ancestors have met adversities;
They have overcome hardships;
Their trials and tribulations are duly recognized in the history books.

Showing their might before the barbarians,
Calming the anxiety within themselves—
That would resolve my life-long yet unfilled ambitions.
And yet,
My generation is indeed unlucky;
Our lives have been most unfortunate.
We drift like tumbleweed in a foreign country;
And suffer the fate of detention as in Youli.[5]

When we bade farewell to our village home,
We were in tears because of survival's desperation.
When we arrived in the American territory,
We stared in vain at the vast ocean.
Our ship docked
And we were transferred to a solitary island.
Ten *li*[6] from the city,
My feet stand on this lonely hill.
The *muk-uk* is three stories high,
Built as firmly as the Great Wall.
Room after room are but jails,
And the North Gate firmly locked.

Here—
Several hundreds of my countrymen are like fish caught in a net;
Half a thousand Yellow Race are like birds trapped in a mesh.
As we lift our heads and look afar,
The barbarian reed pipes all the more add to our anguish and grief.
As we cock our ear and try to listen,
The horses' neighing further worsens our solitude and sorrow.

During the day, we endure a meal of crackers and cheese,
Just like Yan Hui eating rice and water;[7]

5. King Wen (ca. 12th century B.C.), founder of the Zhou state, was held captive at Youli because the last Shang king regarded him as a potential threat to his rule. His son, King Wu, later defeated the Shang and established the Zhou dynasty.

6. One *li* is approximately one-third of a mile.

7. Yan Hui (521–490 B.C.), the poorest of Confucius's disciples, ate very simply and yet was content.

At night, we wrap ourselves in a single blanket,
Just like Min Qian wearing clothes made of rush.[8]
We wash in the morning in salty tidal water;
We drink murky water to quench our thirst.[9]
In this newly open facility
Neither land nor water is in harmony with us.
Drinking the water makes many cough;
Eating the meal causes many to have sore throats.
A hundred ailments come about;
Our pain and sufferings are beyond words!

At times the barbarians would become angry with us,
They kick and punch us severely.
By chance, in their sudden cruel moment,
They would point their guns at us.
They scrutinize us like Prince Qin inspecting his soldiers;[10]
They trap us with schemes like Han Xin's multiple levels of encirclement.[11]
Brothers cannot share words, separated by faraway mountains;
Relatives cannot comfort each other, divided by the distant horizon.[12]
Inside this room—
Neither Heaven nor Earth answers my cries.
Outside this prison
A hundred birds chirp in grief in the mournful woods.
A thousand animals run in fright among gloomy clouds and mist.
This is indeed living with nature, amidst trees, rocks, deer, and wild boars!

Alas! Heaven!
So desolate is this sight

8. Min Ziqian (536–487 B.C.), or Min Sun, a disciple of Confucius, was treated cruelly by his stepmother when he was young. She used to clothe him in rushes, which failed to keep out the winter cold.

9. At the time, the immigration station did not have any freshwater tanks. Drinking water came from a spring, which at one point contained traces of fecal contamination (letter from Acting Commissioner L. C. Steward to the Commissioner General of Immigration, December 19, 1910).

10. Li Shimin was a general before he became the second emperor of the Tang dynasty (A.D. 627–649).

11. Han Xin (d. 196 B.C.) was an important general who served the first emperor of the Han dynasty.

12. Chinese detainees were not allowed visitors for fear of collusion before the immigration interrogation.

It is disheartening indeed.
Sorrow and hardship have led me to this place;
What more can I say about life?
Worse yet,
A healthy person would become ill after repeated medical examinations;
A private inspection would render a clothed person naked.
Let me ask you, the barbarians:
Why are you treating us in such extreme?
I grieve for my fellow countrymen;
There is really nothing we can do!

All the tall bamboo from Zhongnan Mountain cannot inscribe our words of frustration.[13]
All the water in the Eastern Sea will not cleanse our sense of humiliation.
Perhaps, we can be—
Like Emperor Min of Jin who didn't reject the shame of wearing a blue garb and serving wine,[14]
Like Li Ling who pounded his chest in agony for his Han army surrendering to the Huns.[15]
Our ancestors have encountered such misfortune—
Why does our present generation endure the same?
In a moment of desperation,
What more can one say?
In waiting with concealed weapons for the right moment to arrive—
It is nothing but pure fantasy.

Alas,
Such tyranny of the White Race!
Such tragedy of the Yellow Souls!
Like a homeless dog forced into a confining cage,
Like a trapped pig held in a bamboo cage,
Our spirits are lost in this wintry prison;
We are worse than horses and cattle.

13. This idea is taken from a proverb, which alludes to crimes so numerous they will not fit on slips made from all the bamboo in the Zhongnan Mountains. The ancient Chinese often wrote on bamboo slips.

14. In A.D. 316 Emperor Min of the Jin dynasty was captured by the Xiongnu and forced to perform such humiliating acts as serving wine to the victors.

15. Li Ling (d. 74 B.C.), a Han general, led an army of foot soldiers against the Xiongnu. After fighting against great odds, he was forced to surrender.

Our tears shed on an icy day,
We are less than the birds and fowls.

In my exile to the ocean's end,
I have found enjoyment in reading newspapers.
It is said that
My old country, my native soil—
Split apart like pea pods
Cut up like melons.
I mourn that
My motherland, my native culture—
Swallowed by wolves,
Digested by the tigers.

It is my wish:
Someone like Chen She will drop the ploughs on the field,[16]
Someone like Tian Heng will raise the righteous banner,[17]
And pick up the weapons—
Leveling the State of Qin,
Wiping out the State of Wu.

Just take a look at China today:
We the Han people must take over.
Otherwise—
We will be butchered;
We will be enslaved;
We will be subjugated.
There is a difference between the true ruler and the imposter.[18]

How can we bear witness:
Four hundred million Chinese people, again, enslaved by other nations?

16. Chen She (d. 208 B.C.) led the first large-scale peasant rebellion recorded in Chinese history, against the Qin imperial government in 209 B.C. His forces soon expanded from nine hundred to several tens of thousands as he proclaimed himself a royal sovereign. However, he was defeated by a Qin army and subsequently assassinated by his chariot driver, who chose to surrender to the foe.

17. Tian Heng (d. 202 B.C.) was a descendant of the nobility in the state of Qi that was absorbed into the Qin empire. Toward the end of the Qin dynasty, he and his cousin led many former soldiers of Qi in a revolt to reestablish the state of Qi. However, he was defeated by the Han and fled with five hundred followers to an island. Soon afterward, the Han emperor summoned him to Luoyang, where he killed himself. When his followers on the island heard the news, they all committed suicide.

18. This is a critique of the inept rule of the Qing government in power at the time.

Five thousand years of civilization, like in India, obliterated?[19]
We feel grievious,
How can we suppress our cries?

SOURCE: *Xinning Zazhi* 28 (1911): 76–78. Translator: Marlon K. Hom.

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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).

此稿由被囚烟租埃崙木屋中人寄來。亟照原稿登錄，以供衆覽。筆者以身受之苦，作悲憤之文。血耶？淚耶？墨耶？吾知海內外同胞讀之，必生無限激刺矣。雖然，吾同胞雖有無限之激刺，空作楚囚之對泣，亦何濟於事。若非發奮振作，萬衆一心，以共圖祖國之富强，使我黃龍國旗，輝映於太平洋兩岸，未易一雪此恥耳。

記者誌
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19. During this period when China was threatened by foreign powers, Chinese patriots often used India, which was then ruled by the British, as an example to alert their countrymen to the threat of foreign aggression against China's sovereignty.

木屋拘囚序

嘗思嚙雪餐氈，蘇武守漢朝之節；
卧薪嘗胆，越王報吳國之讎。
古人坎坷屢遇，
前輩艱辛備嘗。
卒克著名於史册，
振威於蠻夷，
以解衷懷之憂，
而慰畢生之願也。
獨我等時運不濟，
命途多舛。
蓬飄外國，永遭羑里之囚；
離別故鄉，頻灑窮途之淚。
躬到美域，徒觀海水之汪洋；
船泊碼頭，轉撥埃崙之孤島。
離埠十里，托足孤峯。
三層木屋，堅如萬里長城；
幾度監牢，長扃北門鎖鑰。

同胞數百，難期漏網之魚；
黃種半千，恍若密羅之雀。
有時舉頭而眺，
胡笳互動，益增惆悵之悲；
或者傾耳而聽，
牧馬悲鳴，倍覺無聊之想。
日餐醬酪，步顏子之簞瓢；
夜蓋單褥，同閔騫之蘆服。
朝則盥濯，盡是鹹潮；
時而飲滋，無非濁水。
矧遐荒新聞，水土欠和
飲焉而咳嗽者甚繁，
啜焉而喉痛者不少。
病端百出，苦楚難云。
間有偶觸胡怒，拳脚交加。
忽起狼心，彈炸向指。
人數目算，秦王之點兵尚存；
戎馬重圍，韓信之妙計猶在。
兄弟莫通一語，遠隔關山；
親朋欲慰寸衷，相離天壤。
處此間也，欲籲天而天無聞；
入此室也，欲叫地而地不應。
且也樹木陰翳於囚外，百鳥悲啼；
雲霞垂覆於山前，千獸駭走。
正所謂與木石居，與鹿豕遊者矣。
嗟！嗟！
觸景生情，
荒涼滿目。
愁難遣此，
命也何如？
尤有慘者，診脈幾回，無病宛然有病；
驗陰數次，裹身一若裸身。
借問犬戎，夫何使我至極？
哀哉吾輩，然亦無如之何。
雖削南山之竹，寫不盡牢騷之詞；
竭東海之波，流不淨慚愧之狀。
或者曰，狄庭行酒，晉愍不辭青衣之羞；
漢軍降奴，李陵曾作椎心之訴。
古人尚如此，今人獨不忍乎？
夫事窮勢迫，亦復何言？
藏器待時，徒空想像。
嗚呼！白種强權，黃魂受慘。
叱喪家之狗，强入牢籠；
追入笠之豚，嚴加鎖鑰。
魂消雪窖，眞牛馬之不如；
淚灑氷天，洵禽鳥之不若也。
但我躬既竄海曲，性品悅看報章。
稱說舊鄉故土，荳剖瓜分；
哀憐舉國斯文，狼吞虎噬。
（中略）
將見四百兆之華民，重爲數國之奴隸；
五千年之歷史，化爲印度之危亡。
良可慨也，
尚忍言哉？

1 世界日報作"齊"

ANGEL ISLAND POEMS

1. (Lai #6)

北遊咸道樂悠悠，
船中苦楚木樓愁。
數次審查猶未了，
太息[1]同胞被逼留。
香山人題

[1] 余本作"惜"

The journey to North America was said to be an everlasting joy:
Mistreatment on board, miseries inside the wooden building!
So much interrogation and inspection, with no ends in sight,
Pity my fellow countrymen here, forced to stay.

2. (Lai #7)

本擬舊歲來美洲，
洋蚨迫阻到初秋。
織女會牛郎哥日，
乃搭林肯總統舟。
餐風嘗浪廿餘日，
幸得平安抵美洲。
以爲數日可上埠，
點知苦困木樓囚。
番奴苛待眞難受，
感觸家境淚雙流。
但願早登三藩市，
免在此間倍添愁。

Originally, I planned to come America last year.
Foreign dollars barred me from coming until early fall.
On the festival day of the Weaving Maid meeting the Cowherd,
I went on board the *SS Lincoln*.
For over twenty days, fed with wind and waves;
Blessed, I arrived in America safely.
I thought I would be going ashore in a few days;
How was I to expect to be impisoned in a wooden building?
Abuses from the barbarians are hard to bear;
Conditions at home lead to two streams of flowing tears.
I pray that I can land in San Francisco very soon,
And spare me the additional miseries of being here.

3. (Lai 9)

夙慕花旗幾優哉，
即時籌款動程來。
風波閱月已歷盡。
監牢居所受災磨。
仰望屋崙相咫尺，
願回祖國負耕鋤。
滿腹牢騷難寢寐，
聊書數句表心裁。

I've longed admired Flowery Flag, a land of opportunity.
Quickly I raised the money and took a journey here.
After more than a month of wind and waves,
I end up suffering in this prison cell.
Looking out, Oakland is just a short distance away;
I'd rather return to my homeland and carry a farming hoe.
With a belly full of grievance and resentment, I can hardly sleep.
I scribble down these few lines to pour out what's on my mind.

4. (Lai #24)

鬚眉七尺愧無伸，
蜷伏圈中俯仰人。
百般忍辱徒呼負，
斯人瀝[1]哭蒼天何？

Shame is a man of seven feet yet unable to stand up for himself:
Cooped up in confinement, controlled by someone else.
I've tried hundreds of ways to endure the humiliation, all in vain.
Heaven! This man's tears are falling; what are you going to do?

[1] 原作"靂"

無限滄桑感，
羈身此樓中。
青山飛不去，
綠水阻英雄。
率爾投筆去，
徒勞反無功。
慎言誠在我，
無語怨東風。

阮題

43

拋離鄉井別椿萱，
遠盼雲山淚盈珠。
遊子志欲陶朱富，
誰知被圄埃崙間？

椎[1]膺中華囊阮籍，
利權外溢國恥兼。
同胞知機圖奮志，
誓奪美國報前仇。

1 原作"撫"

5. (Lai #25)

Such a long time: oceans have become
mulberry groves.
I am still stranded in this building.
No way can one fly over green
mountains;
The blue waves can stop any brave men.
Too hastily I've given up my writing
brush for this;
My laborious efforts are now all in vain.
I know I should be careful when I talk;
What can I say--I can only blame
everything on the eastern wind.

6. (Lai #43)

I leave behind the village well, bidding
my parents farewell.
A glance at distant clouds and
mountains leads to tears flooding
my eyes.
A sojourner's wish is to amass a hefty
fortune;
Who expects to be in prison on Island?

I pound my chest and cry loudly for my
poor China:
She suffers indignity, her wealth and
sovereignity taken away.
My fellow countrymen, be wise, be
resolute!
Let's take over America, and get even!

A Gold Mountain Man's Monologue

Jann Mon Fong (Smiley Jann)
Translated by Marlon K. Hom

Editor's Note: Jann Mon Fong (aka Smiley Jann) was born in 1913 in Longdu, Zhongshan District, Guangdong. He completed eight years of schooling before his father bought papers for him to immigrate to America as Sue Sow Fung, the son of a Chinese woman who had been born in Modesto, CA. In 1931, he boarded the President McKinley *bound for San Francisco with high hopes of finding a better livelihood. Upon arrival, his hopes were dashed by the harsh treatment he received from immigration officials at Angel Island. His three-week confinement there so angered him that he decided to write home about it. "I wanted my classmates to know that America is not as great as everyone thinks, that we actually suffered a great deal of humiliation," he said many years later in an interview.[1] His essay, "A Gold Mountain Man's Monologue," sat on his desk for four years before he decided to send it, not realizing that his friends in Shanghai would submit it to the journal,* Ren Jian Shi (People's World), *for publication.[2] It is a rare and emotional first-hand account of how Chinese immigrants responded with indignation to their mistreatment at Angel Island.*

We were lucky to have been able to interview Smiley Jann in 1976, because he not only called our attention to this essay, but he also shared his notebook of ninety-nine poems that he had carefully copied from the barrack walls of Angel Island when he was detained there. "The poems were written all over the walls at Angel Island, wherever the hand could reach, even in the lavatories," he told us. He remembered feeling overwhelmed with grief and bitterness as he copied them. In his opinion, "They are not great poems, but they express true feelings." He understood that "the poems represent the earliest literary expression of overseas Chinese and serve as an important record of Chinese American history." Thanks to Jann Mon Fong and his foresight, we now have a better understanding of what actually happened at Angel Island as well as a deeper appreciation for the courage, perseverance, and literary skills shown by these early Chinese immigrants.

Whenever there was an air-horn-blasting, foreign steamship arriving at port, there would be our countrymen among the passengers returning home after striking it rich in foreign soil. Their suitcases were filled with foreign dollars that would enable them to pursue all the comforts and needs for their triumphant homecoming. They would also speak of the sights and sounds of the Gold Mountain, and show off their riches. This was indeed the envy of everyone. I, too, could not resist that envy and temptation for wealth, and for some time had so wished for the opportunity to go overseas.

Time passed and without realizing it, I had become a young adult. Money also became a desperately needed commodity in those years of worldwide depression. My mind was preoccupied with the thought of leaving home to seek a living. Three years ago, at the time of the summer solstice when apricots were ripening, I spent a huge sum of money in silver dollars to buy a slot to come to America. By next summer when the lychees were in season, I left home, bidding farewell to my beloved parents.

It took only a few hours to get to Hong Kong from Chungshan. But the United States Consulate in Hong Kong dictated that all U.S.-bound Chinese people must report at least half a month in advance for pre-departure immunizations and the physical examination. It was done, as they said, so that we would go to the wonderfully sanitized United States with a clean and healthy

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[1] Smiley Jann, interview in Cantonese with Him Mark Lai and Judy Yung, San Francisco, CA, January 4, 1976, Interview #32, Angel Island Oral History Project, Ethnic Studies Library, UC Berkeley.

[2] The essay was published in *Ren Jian Shi,* March 5, 1935, 15-16.

body, after clearing all the dirty and harmful substances inside our body system. For the sake of economic advancement in America, and like all my fellow countrymen, I subjected myself to this ridiculous process. Still, I didn't comprehend the implications behind it.

Braving the winds and waves for twenty days, the ship finally docked. The returning Gold Mountain old-timers left the pier soon after their immigration inspection. We, the newcomers, were transferred by a small boat to an island located inside the Golden Gate, which was, as told by old-timers, the immigration detention center for all incoming Chinese immigrants.

The moment we were put on the small boat, we lost all our freedom. The Americans treated us like cattle. Those green-eyed people must have considered Chinese as offspring of pigs and goats. Carrying a clothed bundle on my back and a suitcase in my hand, I was herded into the detention center under their wolf-like authority. Tears flowed down my face. Fight back? Not a chance. How could I, since I have yet to learn their language upon arrival in their land?

First, we were put inside a small room surrounded with barbed wire. Their intention was obvious, but they claimed it must be done as they reported our arrival to their superior officers. At that moment, I was in grief with the realization that my country and my people were powerless, and myself, facing an unknown and uncertain future. Now we were treated from being a herd of cattle to being hapless birds confined in a cage, ready for slaughter.

On that first day, we had breakfast before daybreak; and it wasn't until evening before we heard the call for supper. I didn't feel hungry all day, probably because I was full from being fed up with the cruel treatment there. Soon we were led into a huge prison. The moment we were all inside, they locked the door tightly. I found my bunk. Several fellow countrymen who had been detained there for some time, asked me to join the Self-governing Association that was established by the Chinese detainees. About two hundred of us detainees attended the meeting, during which the association officers told us the rules and regulations.

We were subject to yet another physical examination the next day, and the procedure was particularly humiliating, targeting our entire race. The physician ordered us to disrobe and bear the chilly sea breeze for hours. He felt our chest and spine, and ordered us to jump around like monkeys. I was not sure if this was a physical examination, or rather, an act of insult. Well, it was said that my treatment was actually light and easy. In the past, they would draw blood from our flesh to test for hookworm disease.

In the Self-governing Association office were a phonograph, some record albums, and fiction books. There was also a small playground outside the detention barrack. Like the dormitory, it was also surrounded by barbed wire. The Caucasian guards kept the key to the playground's gate. In fact, there were armed guards on patrol both inside and outside the detention barrack. Don't ever think of trying to escape; they would send you off to another world. For the Chinese held up here, there is little if any freedom accorded them!

All over the walls of the dormitory were numerous scribbling of poems, rhymes, ditties, and parallel couplets written by Chinese detainees. Being idled there without much to do, I copied them down verbatim in a notebook without any editorial changes. Here are a few examples:

[Poem 58]
May I advise you not to sneak across the barrier.
Green waters surround a green hill on four sides.
Ascending to a high place, one does not see
the shore.
To cross the green waters is the most difficult
of difficulties.

58
勸君切勿來偷閘，
四圍綠水繞青山。
登高遠望無涯岸，
欲渡綠水難上難。

生命堪虞君自重，
斯言不是作爲閒。
盍任撥回歸國去？
覓些[1]營生捱兩[2]餐。

[1]余本作"些"
[2]余本作"二"

Life is worth worrying about and you should restrain yourselves.
Do not treat these words as idle words.
Why not let them deport you back to China?
You will find some work and endure to earn a couple of meals.

50 棄書荒硯來飄洋；
意欲把我素心揚。
難料到此遭囹圄；
壯志待酬抱恨長。
堪嘆來此如萍寄；
犧牲巨款受鬼劄[1]。
此行深願酬我志；
否則囚困苦斷腸。

[1]余本作"腥"

[Poem 50]
It is indeed pitiable the harsh treatment of our fellow countrymen.
The doctor extracting blood caused us the greatest anguish.
Our stomachs are full of grievances, but to whom can we tell them?
We can but pace to and fro, scratch our heads, and question the blue sky.

6

梓里成羣，千金不惜，圖走美；
同胞數百，巨資投擲，困埃崙。

[Poem A6]
Flocks of fellow villagers do not refrain from spending thousands of gold pieces to get to America.
Several hundred compatriots invested huge sums but are now imprisoned on Island.[3]

33 飄零湖海倏經秋；
萬劫纔過作楚囚。
伍子吹簫懷雪恨；
蘇卿持節誓報仇。
霹雲射矢非多事；
勾踐卧薪却有由。
激[1]烈肝腸輕一決；
蒼天諾否此志酬。

[1]余本作"墾"

[Poem A33]
Drifting alone in the ocean, autumn suddenly passed.
I have just gone through ten thousand calamities; still I am a prisoner from Chu.[4]
When Wu Zixu played his flute, he thought of erasing his grievances.[5]
When Su Ziqing held his tasseled staff, he vowed he would one day avenge his wrongs.[6]
When Jiyun shot an arrow at the enemy, he was not doing it to meddle.[7]
Goujian slept on firewood, but he had a reason.[8]

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[3] The colloquial name given to Angel Island by Cantonese immigrants.
[4] I.e., a held prisoner, a person in difficult straits.
[5] Wu Yuan (? –485 B.C.) or Wu Zixu was the son of a high official serving the King of Chu (a state in the central Yangzi River basin). His father fell into the king's disfavor and was killed together with his family. Wu Zixu, however, fled to the state of Wu (in present Jiangsu Province). Upon arrival, he had only a flute, which he played in the marketplace to beg for food. Later, Wu Zixu became an important official serving the Wu king and led an army to defeat the state of Chu. His victorious legions entered the Chu capital in 506 B.C., whereupon Wu Zixu dug up the corpse of the former king and whipped it three hundred times.
[6] Another name for Su Wu (140--60 B.C.), who during the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.--24 A.D.) was sent by the Chinese government as envoy to Xiongnu, a nomadic people north of the Chinese empire. Su Wu was detained there for nineteen years, but refused to renounce his loyalty to the Han emperor.
[7] During the An Lushan rebellion (755--760 A.D.), the rebel army surrounded Suiyang (in present Henan Province). Nan Jiyun (? --757 A.D.) was one of the defenders of the besieged city and shot the enemy general in the left eye with one arrow.

My inflamed liver and bowels are prepared to take life
Lightly and engage in a life and death struggle.
Will the blue heavens allow me to fulfill this ambition or not?

[Poem A54]
This unworthy one with the group is grief-stricken.
Who will transmit the news of death back to the village?
I mourn your having ridden the crane to return to the dark regions.[9]
A traveler arrived in America on a ship.
Tears enveloped the lonely soul as the cuckoo uttered its mournful cry.
Sorrow has led me to dream of traveling to the Terrace of Yang.[10]
It is a pity that medicine was wrongly prescribed.
The corpse was nearly cremated to ashes.

54 忝屬同羣事感哀。
訃音誰遞故鄉回？
痛君騎鶴歸冥去；
有客乘槎赴美來。
淚鎖孤魂悲杜宇；
愁牽旅夢到陽台。
可憐跡石施醫誤；
險被焚尸一炬灰。

These writings are the testimonies of hardship on their journey to America. Among these writings are references to suicides due to frustration and humiliation. As I was copying them from the walls, I was overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. I wrote the following in response to what I saw on the walls:

[Poem A10]
When I left, my parents regretted it was so hurried.
The reason I tearfully swallow my resentment is because of poverty.
Wishing to escape permanent poverty, I fled overseas.
Who caused my destiny to be so perverse that I would become imprisoned?
The victim of aggression, people of our nation mourn the desperate times.
I feel sorely guilty for having not yet repaid my parents' kindness.
Grieving the cold night, the insects now make noise.
Not only do I sob silently, but my throat tastes bitter.

10 離時父母恨忽忽；
飲忽速速也爲窮。
欲免長貧奔海外；
誰教命舛困囚中？
侵凌國族悲時切；
未報親恩抱罪隆。
今也鳴蟲哀冷夜；
不單幽咽苦喉嚨。

Altogether I spent twenty days in detention at the wooden barracks, two of which was for interrogation and deposition. On the afternoon of the twentieth day, I was permitted to be ferried out, and I finally landed in this place erroneously called since my childhood years, the heavenly "Gold Mountain."

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[8] Goujian was king of the state of Yue (in present Zhejiang Province). In 494 B.C. he was ignominiously defeated by King Fucha's armies from the state of Wu. Two decades later in 476 B.C., Yue recovered and returned to defeat Wu. During Yue's recovery period, it was alleged that King Goujian slept on firewood and tasted gall bladder in order not to forget the bitterness and humiliation of his defeat.

[9] I.e., death. In Chinese mythology, cranes are connected with immortals.

[10] King Huai of Chu (328 - 299 B.C.) met a female immortal in a dream and had sexual relations with her. She was found every morning and evening at the foot of the Terrace of Yang, which has come to be used as an allusion to a place were men and women meet for sexual liaisons.

Perhaps we should think this over: We are dealt with all this difficulty and adversity when going to another's country. Yet, when they come to our country, why do they behave so superior on our home soil?

After he was landed, Jann Mon Fong adopted the name Smiley Jann and forged ahead with his life in America. He started out in Santa Barbara, California, where he worked in his paper father's dry goods store and later, as a houseboy for a wealthy family while he attended high school. Finding English difficult to learn, Jann eventually returned to San Francisco, where he married Mildred Lee, had four children, and ran a grocery store in the Western Addition neighborhood for over thirty years. He broke the racial barrier when he became the first Chinese member of the San Francisco Wholesale Grocers Association. He was an officer of the Tung Sen Benevolent Association (for people from Zhongshan) and helped to establish a scholarship program for its members. "My feeling is that if I can't achieve my goal of success, the second generation will," he told us.[11]

Jann took pride in seeing all four of his children graduate from college and become successful dentists, a teacher, and a computer programmer. But he never once mentioned Angel Island to them, not even after he voluntarily participated in the Confession Program and cleared his name. According to his son Arliss, "We did not even know that he had gone through the Confession Program until he said we are changing our last names from Sue to Jann."[12] *Nothing more was said, but the children did notice that following this incident, their father was able to return to China periodically for visits. Smiley Jann passed away in 1997 at the age of 84, leaving behind his notebook of Angel Island poems, which he had titled, "A Collection of Autumn Grass: Voices from the Hearts of the Weak."*

[11] Interview with Him Mark Lai and Judy Yung.
[12] Arliss Jann, email correspondence with Judy Yung, July 18, 2009.