

"It was not a winnable war"

Remembering Vietnam (1998)

Johnny Wong

The legacy of the Vietnam War, which continues to haunt America today, holds special meaning in the memories of the Chinese American baby boomer generation—those born after World War II. The Tet Offensive in 1968 marked a turning point in America's effort to stop the spread of communism in Indochina and the beginning of their involvement in the war. On the homefront, those who joined the antiwar movement questioned the racial and moral implications of the war in relation to their newfound identities as Asian Americans. At the warfront, those who served in Vietnam suffered not only combat trauma but also the race-related stress of being treated as "gooks" by fellow Americans. Moreover, when they returned from the war that the United States lost, they were spat on rather than saluted, adding to the severity of their post-traumatic stress disorders.

Jason Chang, an undergraduate working on an oral history paper, explores these issues in the following interview with Vietnam War veteran Johnny Wong. Specifically, he wanted to know: What were Wong's experiences as a Chinese American in the Vietnam War? Was racism in the military more pronounced for him because he looked like the enemy? Did he suffer post-traumatic stress disorder upon his return, and if so, how did he deal with it? Wong had never openly talked about his memories of the Vietnam War, and as the interview progressed, it became apparent that he had his own story to tell, beginning with his troubled childhood in San Francisco, his first experience with racial prejudice, and the events that led to his tour of duty in Vietnam. In the last analysis, Johnny Wong's story is about one soldier's survival of mind, body, and soul in a senseless and unwinnable war.

GROWING UP

I was born on November 22, 1945, in Canton City, China. I immigrated to this country when I was about two and a half; I can vaguely remember living

close to Chinatown in a hotel, and then we moved down by the Embarcadero Center in San Francisco. My father ran a laundry, so we were living on top of the laundry. My brother and I stayed in a small room. So I kind of grew up down there until about ten or eleven. Then we moved out here by the tunnel on Geary Boulevard. That was the home that I was in for a long time, until after high school. I attended Washington Irving Elementary School, went to Francisco Junior High School, and from Francisco I went to George Washington High School. Then I got kicked out and finished up at John Adams Adult School. After that I attended City College of San Francisco, and then I was drafted.

As far as the places I hung around while growing up, I would say that it was in Chinatown and North Beach. I hung out at Cameron House.¹ My parents wanted to give us some religious or some sense of group activity involvement. It was a place to meet friends. On Fridays we had club meetings, played some sports. Once they started talking about religious things, most of us just turned a deaf ear because that wasn't what we were interested in. I started going in the seventh grade and lasted until about the tenth grade. Going there, it did give me a sense of belonging because my family life when I was young wasn't kosher. My parents were very strict. They adhered to Chinese customs and upbringing. My mother was very demanding and always had negative things to say, like I was bad and always looking for trouble—this constant barrage of nagging, nagging, and nagging. I remember many times being physically abused, of going to junior high and having welts on my back and being ashamed to take off my shirt because it would have been obvious that I had gotten hit. If that happened today, they would probably throw my mom in jail and throw the key away.

In elementary school there were some Caucasians and blacks, but it was predominantly Chinese. When you are young and growing up, the first thing you learn is people swearing and talking bad. When somebody calls you a "Chink" or a "slant-eye," you wonder why they would say things like that. But it's more like bullying—picking on somebody. I think I learned to distinguish being bullied versus having somebody be racist, which was having somebody demonstrate a certain prejudice toward me. That happened later in my life and while I was in the service.

I remember back in the sixties, probably '63 or '64 when I was getting out of high school, the Free Speech Movement was going on at Berkeley, the civil rights movement, and it was the beginning of a lot of demonstrations. What that brought in terms of awareness for me was that a whole mass of people was demonstrating on behalf of something they believed was right.

1. The Donaldina Cameron House, located in San Francisco Chinatown, was established as the Presbyterian Mission Home in 1874 to rescue and help Chinese prostitutes and abused slave girls. Beginning in the 1940s, it turned its attention to youth work in the Chinese community.

I was no longer living at home but with the family of a Puerto Rican friend from high school. Right after high school, he invited me to go down to Puerto Rico. In order for me to get to Puerto Rico I had to take a Greyhound bus. So I went across the United States and I planned to stop off in the Detroit area because my older brother was attending medical school at Wayne State University. I remember going downtown to a Woolworth's and wanting to be served. This was my first time being on my own; I was only about eighteen. The person that was serving behind the counter was black and I just waited and waited and she wouldn't come. As a last resort, I asked her why I wasn't being served and she said (*pauses*), I can't remember exactly what she said, but I just got the feeling that something was being taken out on me, and I just picked up and walked out of there.

Just before I made the decision to sign up for the military my father admitted that he came to this country illegally.² I wasn't born here, I was naturalized here, so for years I had to carry a green card. When he made that statement it put my older brother and me in a very precarious situation. Because my father admitted to having come to this country illegally, my brother and I would have to go through the process of naturalization again. At that time I had to make a decision about going into the service even though I was against the war. I could voluntarily enlist or my other option was to not go at all. My Puerto Rican friend's mother, who was a teacher, told me one of my options was to leave the country, go to Canada. Looking back at it now, if I had made that decision I would probably have never come back because I wasn't a citizen. I felt that by enlisting I would be giving myself a choice as to some kind of training versus none if I were drafted. Although I would be obligated to serve one extra year, I didn't want to take a chance ending up in the infantry. These were some of the circumstances that pushed me to enlist.

The situation back then was that if you continued schooling, it would give you a deferment from the draft, but you had to carry a full course load. Under those circumstances, it was a lot of pressure just to think that there was a war going on, so that staying in school and taking a full course load was very hard. What was I trying to accomplish while I was in school? Was I in school to not get drafted, or what if something happened and my grades were to slip? My grades slipped and I knew that most likely I was going to be drafted. I tried to sign up for the navy, but it was too late. I never really considered signing up for the air force because it was a four-year commitment. The other alternative was the marines, and I definitely didn't want to go into the marines. Back then, they had the reputation as being those who were really gung-ho. So my only option was the army. To give you an example, the

2. Johnny Wong's father had entered the United States as a "paper son" in 1930 in order to circumvent the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1966 he took advantage of the Chinese Confession Program that allowed paper sons to disclose their false status and claim their true identities.

month that I was drafted—October 1966—48,000 guys got drafted in that one month. Of course I contemplated dodging the draft. I had a friend, I remember going to the physical right after we got the draft papers, he took a load of soy sauce and drank it to try and mess up his body. From what I remember, he got away with it.

LIFE IN THE ARMY

When I was at Fort Lewis, Washington (boot camp), the drill sergeant picked me and some others to be squad leaders. Whether he did that intentionally or not I can't be sure, but that was not the right environment for me to be assertive or aggressive because I was not there by choice. I just wanted to be done with it and get on to the next step in terms of what we had to do. I happened to be in command of a group of rednecks, and that didn't work out for me at all. They called me "slant-eye," "Chink," and things like that. Being bombarded with all this verbal garbage was something that I really wasn't accustomed to. When I grew up I learned to take care of myself. I could handle somebody trying to bully me, but all these racist comments coming from more than one individual was something different. I just tolerated it as much as I could, I didn't go out and explode or anything like that. I had enough problems as it was, trying to be their type of soldier when it was totally uncomfortable.

I remember this incident where I was learning to handle a rifle, M14, and I remember we were sitting down and they were demonstrating how to load the magazine. So we were loading the cartridge and I was putting a round into the chamber but I accidentally pulled the trigger. (*laughs a little*) So fire, you hear a shot. I said, "Holy shit." (*laughs*) I mean, I knew it was a blank, but I really didn't know what a blank can do and not do. It came really close to this person that was sitting next to me, and when that round went off, it totally silenced everybody. The drill sergeant immediately says, "Who fired that round?" I felt like digging myself all the way to China, but I'm raising my hand and going through this uncomfortable situation. How they'd address you is like, "Come here and stand at attention." And then the officer says, "What do you do when you're in front of an officer?" You're supposed to salute, you know, but shit, I was uncomfortable enough going through all this. In essence, they pulled me from being a squad leader. I felt pretty bad and my self-esteem just went down twenty levels. Not only had I been reprimanded, but they took my squad away and I ended up doing k.p. duty because of this mishap.

I had enlisted for supply training, so after basic training at Fort Lewis, I had orders to go to Fort Dix in New Jersey. I remember feeling relief because I was getting further away from Vietnam. Then after spending six or eight weeks in New Jersey, I got orders to go to Hanau, Germany. I thought how

lucky because I was getting even further and further away. I still had two more years to do and I was hoping that this was where I would stay for the remainder of my service. I was put in a motor pool with a section called PLL (Prescribe Load Lists), which supplied the artillery units with trucks, parts, etc. We were to ensure the unit's combat and mission readiness by keeping accurate records of parts and parts supplied. After about three months I was sent to another supply school, where I graduated sixth out of a class of thirty. Then it was back to Hanau. By then, all I was doing was going to work every day, getting everything ready, and at night listening to my friends bitch and drink. I remember that I wanted to go back on the West Coast, to be closer to home. I remember discussing that with some of my superiors and they said that I could try. Then out of the blue came orders saying that I was going to Nam. What was mind-blowing was that there were 400 guys in the battalion and I was the only one who got the order. I was just in shock at the time. I went down to personnel and asked, "Why me?" This is the answer he gave me—there's nothing I can say to disprove it or say that it's not fair—he said that a computer in Washington, D.C., kicked my name out. I was saying, "Jesus Christ!!" There were a lot of guys with my M.O. [military occupation] and more time left in the service, and he was telling me that the computer picked my name. How can I believe that, but at the same time who am I going to question? I tried to come up with gimmicks about why I couldn't go. I'm not a citizen and other stuff, but it didn't make a difference because they could send noncitizens to Vietnam.

THE VIETNAM WAR

I got into Vietnam on April 1, 1968. The reason they sent so many soldiers in that year was because of Tet.³ What the American people had been told up to that point by General Westmoreland was that South Vietnam was more or less under control. What had happened was that all the major cities had gone under attack, including Saigon. Everything had totally broken down, and that is part of the reason I was going to Vietnam. President Johnson had made a commitment that he was going to commit up to 500,000 more troops. Prior to my going there, there were probably already over 300,000 troops. And he was committing 500,000 more?

I remember arriving in Vietnam at about two in the afternoon and the air-conditioning was turned off and the door of the plane was opened. As the humidity filled the plane, I kept thinking that this was the biggest joke of my life. My original orders were to go to another artillery unit. But for

3. The Tet Offensive, which began in 1968 during the Vietnamese New Year, was a decisive turning point in the Vietnam War as the Viet Cong overwhelmed cities and towns across South Vietnam, shattering U.S. confidence about winning the war.

some reason, during the three days that I spent in processing, the orders were changed and they told me that I was going to the 25th Infantry Division in Cu Chi (20 miles northwest of Saigon). I'm freaking out and saying to myself, "Jesus Christ, why them [the infantry]?"

When I arrived in Cu Chi, I was assigned to a mechanized battalion as a PLL clerk in the motor pool. The first person that greeted me in Nam was this Asian guy, very dark, and he was wearing fatigues with no insignia. I couldn't tell if he was a Vietnamese or someone else. He introduced himself as Jimmy (*chuckles to himself*) and talked kind of funny because he was Chinese and from New York. He was in the infantry. Going through supply school and being in Germany was nothing compared to what he had gone through already. We talked about why he didn't show his insignia. He thought it was safer to not wear the insignia so that the Vietnamese might mistake him for one of their own and not fire on him. But at the same time, wouldn't the American soldiers maybe mistake him for being a Vietnamese? The difference is, when you're out in the field you know who your buddies are so you rely on them to watch your back. Jimmy took me aside and taught me not to panic should we come under attack. Try to calm yourself before reacting. He said that the Viet Cong knew our routine and that I should always be careful before coming out in the morning for reveille. Learning these things made me feel like someone was there to help me. As we got to know each other in a short period of time, I couldn't help but feel more compassion for him. Later, I was happy to hear he made it home.

Sure enough, the first day that I got into my base camp, I was walking to report in and I heard these sounds. It was like "ptooo, ptooo, ptooo," like something coming out of a tube. As I am walking toward the door, about to open the screen door, I see two guys—one guy going this way and one guy going the other way (*gestures in opposite directions with his hands*), so I'm going like this (*gets down on his hands and knees*). I'm not lying down flat because I don't know what it is. Well, those are mortars and when it hits the ground it makes an explosion. The other guys are running out, I don't know where they're running because I'm not familiar with the base camp and it was semi-dark. But I go in the front door and out the back door and they've gone into a bunker, so I *jump* right into the bunker! Instead of running down into the bunker I jumped, I mean we're talking about ten feet! That's how scared I was. That was the mentality in terms of learning—you had to learn as quickly as possible what was really going on. Yeah, we were in a big base camp. Did I feel safe? No.

After I was there for two weeks, we went under a rocket attack. I mean Jesus Christ! It was worse than a mortar round. It was like you could just hear it going, "schwooo!!" That's how it sounds, and then there is a ripple effect. You hear that and you're petrified. That one particular evening we were under that constant barrage. We were inside the hooch—that's where we lived—



Johnny Wong (*left*) with his buddy Jimmy in Vietnam.
(Courtesy of Johnny Wong)

not one of us took a chance and said, "Let's get the hell out of here." Each hooch has a bunker in front or on the side, so when you're under attack, the first thing you do is hit the ground, and then during the period when you don't hear anything, you get up and run to the bunker as quickly as you can. The bunkers are about twelve feet deep and filled with sandbags so I felt a hell of a lot safer in them. I will never forget that night. I was so petrified I was under the mattress. Of course if the roof caved in we'd all be gone. But all of a sudden I remembered hearing a second lieutenant come running in there and yelling, "What the fuck are you guys doing in here? Get the fuck out of here!" And I was thinking, this guy's got balls. Then one guy said, "You think we should go for it?" I said, "Hell yeah, go for it!" And then, "vooom!" from both ends, because there was an entrance on both sides of the hooch. We stayed in the bunker all night. In the morning I saw the damage. Right next to the bunker was a hole about six feet deep by twelve feet wide where a rocket had hit. I was thinking, shit, I have to go through this! I had just been there a couple of weeks.

You asked earlier if I had seen any fighting because I was in the rear—there was no such thing as the rear, it was all Vietnam. It wasn't like you could take point A, clear it out completely, and be safe. No. How it was set up was that the United States and other countries—you even had Korean soldiers there and maybe Australians—would disperse soldiers out on patrol to contact with "Charlie" or V.C.'s. Once contact was made with "Charlie," all available fire power would be used in these operations (artillery, helicopter gunship, fighter jet napalm, and B-52 bombing). That was called a "search and destroy" mission and how the war was fought. That's what a lot of people don't understand, there was no safe place.

After spending three months with the mechanized unit, I was transferred to the 25th Infantry Division's Command Maintenance Management Inspection (CMMI) team. In my new assignment I was responsible for inspecting all of the division's PLLs. The 25th Division had three main base camps: Cu Chi, Tay Ninh, and Dau Tieng. Our inspection team would fly by helicopter to these base camps and return to Cu Chi after our inspection. Because we were constantly flying, this became the hazardous part of my job. Fortunately, we were never shot down.

Overall, there was a lack of autonomy in the army. All orders had to be followed. I remember one time I disobeyed orders because I felt they were unfair. Usually in the morning because we go from one base camp to another base camp, they would tell us if we were to pull any duty, like sentry duties or k.p., before we flew out. On this one morning, nothing was said to me in terms of duties, so I flew out to another base camp, did my inspection with the team, came back, and then I was told I had to do duties. I didn't think that was right, so I talked to my sergeant, and he said he would try to do something for me. Well, the next day, nothing was done on my behalf and I was called in to see the commanding officer for disobeying a direct order. Prior to seeing him, I spoke to my major, who was in charge of our inspection team. He assured me everything would be all right. Apparently, he had discussed my situation with the colonel who was in charge of all the units under his command. Because of the severity of my action, it was still necessary for me to see my commanding officer. He chewed me out for over twenty minutes and threatened me with an Article 15 (reprimand and penalty). I knew his actions were only a show and for him to save face. I left without being punished and knew I had dodged a bullet.

Not long after this incident, I approached my major for advice. I found out the 25th Infantry Division Artillery wanted me. My major gave his approval for the transfer. I knew he was leaving Vietnam shortly and that once gone I would no longer have his protection or support. On the day of my transfer, after a brief conversation with my major, he saluted me. I was totally taken aback by this and felt very honored and proud. To this day, I will

always cherish that moment. Deep in my heart, I know my major had genuine respect and understanding for who I was and what I had accomplished while a member of his inspection team.⁴

The two most frightening experiences occurred in the latter part of my tour. After transferring to the Division Artillery, I worked as a PLL clerk and continued to assist other artillery PLLs in preparation for their CMMI inspection. I was in Tay Ninh for a week. When I came back, right where my bed was, a mortar had hit and the roof was all shredded. There was metal and shrapnel all over the place. That really blew my mind! After seeing this, I was hoping the rest of my tour would be less dangerous. Well, all hell broke out about forty days before I came home. What happened in this artillery unit was that the whole base camp exploded under attack one night. The V.C. hit where I was and they hit another portion where the tanks were and they hit the helicopter pad. What they were trying to do was destabilize our forces. The first initial report that we got was that "Charlie" had hit the perimeter, come through about fifty yards, and was shooting r.p.g. rounds at some of our armors (r.p.g. rounds are used to take out heavy artillery). This soldier came back in serious condition because they were throwing grenades and the closeness of the blasts had given him shell shock. By this time all of us had to go out, and I was a specialist E-5, which was equivalent to a sergeant, so there was a certain perimeter that I had to be in command of. We were there all night waiting to see if we were going to be probed or come under heavy attack. All night we fired at any movement or flashes aimed at the base camp. The next morning you could see a lot of dead bodies out there and some Viet Cong were decapitated. That was probably the most terrifying experience for me. I made a promise to myself that if I had an opportunity to come back [safe], then everything and everyday I would appreciate my life more. If you have had anything traumatic happen to you, getting into a bad auto accident or somebody close to you gets injured, it can be a cold feeling. But this thing in Nam, of being stressed out or fearful for a long duration of time, was difficult for a lot of people, including me.

COMING HOME

The best way to describe how I felt at the end of my tour was, by the time I got into the airplane and I knew that I was up, even though I was still in Vietnam air space, I said to myself, I don't really give a shit what happens now. I don't really care if this plane blows up, I'm out of Vietnam. It was a great

4. Johnny Wong received numerous written commendations for his outstanding performance as a PLL inspector in Germany and Vietnam as well as the Army Commendation Medal and the Bronze Star Medal for his meritorious service while with the 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam.

sense of relief from feeling scared like hell every day of my life. Flying back home, all I did was sleep. I mean, after that whole year of sleeping with one eye open and your rifle by your bed, I really slept.

The reality of how I got processed out was that I went to Oakland and spent about 24 or 36 hours there. One of the requirements was that we had to put on the uniforms when we stepped out. I remember I wanted to just walk out and take a cab home and that's it. A lot of Vietnam veterans came back and were not able to adjust because one of the things that I felt, and I'm pretty sure a lot of guys felt this way, was a sense of not having any respect or having any feeling that we had done a good job. I remember this chaplain saying to everyone, "Would you like to re-up [sign up] again?" And all of us were saying, "Fuck you!" It was just a really bad joke. It was a lonely feeling coming back and knowing what the country was going through, and we were just let go like that. They didn't situate us in a group and say, this is what we expect. It was just like that's it, it's over, but for a lot of people it wasn't over.

I can't remember if I took a cab home or if they had a bus. All I remember is approaching my parents' house and seeing a lot of Asian families. There wasn't any joy one way or the other. It was just like, you're home. All I can remember was what I wanted to do was rest, to release my feelings without being bombarded by any distractions. For about four or five months, I didn't really do anything. It was like I was in a daze. Is this real? Am I safe? For a long time I didn't think about anything more than two or three hours in front of me, and now that I was back home, I had no real game plan for what I was gonna do. Eventually I thought, maybe I'll finish up school, maybe I'll get a job, things like that. But it just came gradually.⁵

A high school friend that I bumped into in Vietnam, he came back. We became friends and subsequently, we began playing mah-jongg together. I still remember this one time we were playing and he was sitting there (*points across from him*) and I was sitting here. It was close to the Fourth of July and we heard this "whoosh!!" That same sound I told you about for the rockets. Well, he went this way and I went that way (*waves his hands in opposite directions*) and the other two guys we were with were like, what the fuck are you guys doing? It was just a gut reaction. We freaked out and they laughed at it and we laughed at it afterward, but it was just our normal reflexes. And this was two years after I came back! I will never forget that sound. Like every April 1, April Fool's Day, it's really traumatizing because I always think back to Vietnam. May 22, when I got out. You know, those things that I won't forget . . . (*starts to cry*).

5. Wong eventually earned his B.A. degree in recreation from San Francisco State University and worked for the San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department for a few years before returning to work for the U.S. Postal Service.

It took me more than two years to be able to express any of my feelings. I knew that I had changed a hundred percent. And I knew that friends and people in general were relatively sane. I mean, they weren't impacted by something traumatizing like Vietnam, so how could they relate to me if they never experienced that? Once you have felt that constant pressure of being fearful, like it's each minute of each day, you couldn't go beyond that. The only reason I kept my sanity in Vietnam was by concentrating on what I had to do. As much as I thought we should not be there, I felt what I was doing was important and possibly might save some lives. Even though I wasn't out there on a daily basis fighting, you had these young kids out there fighting. If they didn't get the support from people responsible for that, then they would have more to worry about. That's why I felt a genuine regard toward my responsibilities. On one hand, I was worrying about myself every day. Then on the other hand, I tried to do what I could to help others. I think the combination helped me get through it all.

I had come back from Vietnam more or less in one piece, other than a few psychological problems. I wasn't going to go overboard and feel obsessed with anything. I wouldn't let myself be bothered by trivial things. One of the things I had problems with while I was growing up was my patience. If I didn't like hearing something, I would just totally explode, I would just go bonkers. I have since learned tolerance. It's like waiting in line, sometimes you get a lot of static from people saying things like, what's going on and why is this taking so long? Well, I just say, hey, I'll put up with it. And if I don't want to put up with it, I just walk away because I don't want to waste my time. What I went through in Vietnam just changed everything. It changed the way I thought, and it changed the way I felt, and it changed the way that I wanted to be in relation to my life. Whatever I do in my life I have to enjoy, and if I don't enjoy it, there's no sense in going through the process. I might as well dig the hole now and go under.

I thought a lot about why the U.S. was involved in Vietnam. Putting it in proper context, there was some sincerity in helping South Vietnam out. I knew that, but to what extent do you help out when it's a civil war? The big difference was that in World War II, you had guys like Hitler. The mentality [in the sixties] was the domino effect. If you don't stop communism here, it will act like a row of dominos, but that proved to be wrong. My feelings were, hey, enough is enough. I felt that the U.S. should get out of there because it was not a winnable war. They didn't have a plan or an objective. They just went in and fought and bombed and destroyed things at random. Like the last line in the film *Platoon*: "It doesn't mean a thing." That's how I felt. That's how a lot of soldiers felt because the majority didn't want to be there. I know that for a fact. I feel sad for those people who didn't come back home. Back then and still now I feel sorry for the whole country of Vietnam and for the people because they shouldn't have to go through so much war.

The [memorial] wall in Washington, D.C., did a lot of healing. Just knowing the fact that they, the government, went out of their way to engrave the names of all the people that died. That was the start of the healing. I think it would take more than courage for me to go there, I don't think I have the heart. I think I would be overwhelmed. At one time they had a replica of the wall out here and a friend of mine told me about it and I just didn't have the courage to go.

There was this guy that went to the same high school as me and we were in the same boot camp. It was during my last week and a half in boot camp, and I was really sick, and the last thing we all had to do was go through this fifteen-mile run and hike. It was tough because I had a backpack and I had to carry my rifle, and this guy—he was black and his name was Niles—saw me struggling and he helped me carry my rifle. Prior to that, the drill sergeant had said if you fell out you'd have to go through another six weeks of boot camp. I didn't want to go through another period like this, so without this guy helping me, I wouldn't have made it. When I got out of the service I found out he got killed in Vietnam, and you know, that really bothered me. It really comes down to a lot of wasted life, because you or I don't know what any of these people could have done in terms of accomplishments and living a full life. That's how I look back at it. Close to 60,000 servicemen died in this war, for what? Really, for what?

SOURCE: Johnny Wong, interview with Jason Chang, February 8 and 25, 1998, San Francisco, California, Special Collections, McHenry Library, University of California, Santa Cruz.

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"I'm a Chinaman"

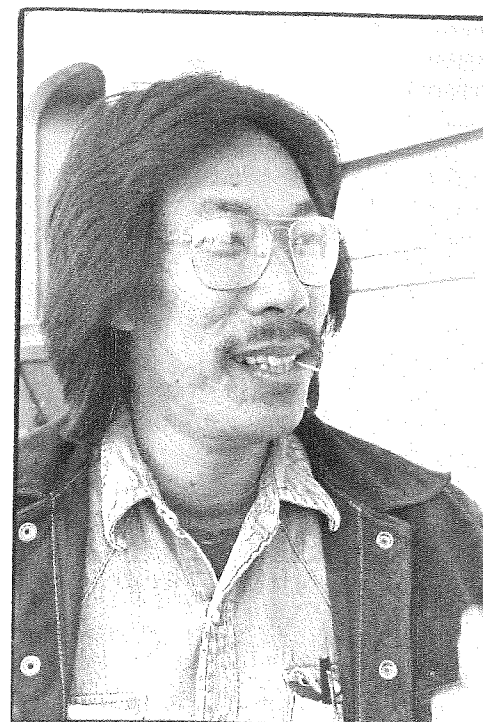
An Interview with Frank Chin (1970)

Jeffery Paul Chan

The era of the antiwar, black power, and Asian American movements motivated many second-generation Chinese Americans to challenge white racism and assert their ethnic identity as neither Oriental nor white American, but uniquely and integrally as Chinese American. One of the most outspoken and influential writers of this period was Frank Chin. Born in 1940 in Berkeley, California, he did his undergraduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley, and also attended the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and the University of California at Santa Barbara. Upon graduation, Chin purposefully got a job as a brakeman with the Southern Pacific Railroad before moving to Seattle to write scripts for the King Broadcasting Company. In 1969 he moved back to California, where he lectured in Asian American studies at the University of California, Davis, and San Francisco State College while helping to found the Combined Asian Resources Project (CARP)¹ and the Asian American Theater Workshop.

At the time of this interview with his colleague Jeffery Paul Chan, a short story writer and chair of Asian American studies at San Francisco State College, Chin had just been physically knocked down by Alex Hing, leader of the Red Guard, a revolutionary organization in San Francisco Chinatown, for calling the organization "a yellow minstrel show." More important, the interview is one of the earliest records of Chin's views on white racism, the emasculation of Chinese men in mainstream media, and the need for Chinese American writers to reclaim an authentic cultural identity—themes that would reoccur in his later writings. The interview was published in East/West, a bilingual weekly founded in 1967 to cover events and concerns of interest to Chinese Americans throughout the country. The paper folded in 1985.

1. CARP consisted of a group of teachers, scholars, and writers who were interested in promoting a deeper understanding of Chinese American sensibilities through conducting oral histories and creating curriculum materials for schools. The group also helped to get literary classics such as John Okada's *No No Boy* and Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* republished.



Frank Chin. (Photo by Connie Hwang)

*Regarded as the "Godfather of Asian American literature," Chin first won acclaim when his plays *The Chickencoop Chinaman* (1972) and *The Year of the Dragon* (1974) became the first Chinese American plays to be produced on the New York stage and on national television. Chin is also known for the groundbreaking *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974) and *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (1991), both of which he coedited with Lawson Inada, Shawn Wong, and Jeffery Paul Chan. His other published works include *The Chinaman Pacific and Frisco R.R. Co.*, a collection of short stories; two novels, *Donald Duk* and *Gunga Din Highway*; and *Bulletproof Buddhists and Other Essays*.*

Why did you come back from Seattle to Chinatown?
I didn't come back just to be beaten up . . . I came back because . . . well, there was you [the interviewer, Jeffery Paul Chan] and a few others, and I felt that the Chinese were beginning to speak out more on their own. It seemed that Chinatown was becoming more aware of itself and its own terms. It was also very obvious to me, outside working in an admittedly white world, that the stereotypes were very confining. That even though I was out, a free

individual, an agent, that I was very confined by the stereotypes. I was always being measured against the stereotypes and having to say I was or I wasn't what someone else thought I was before he'd ever met me.

What stereotype/types?

The Chinese American, native born, has attributed to him all of Chinese culture. Well, not all of Chinese culture, but the good image—the high aesthetic Chinese culture. This is the China of the literary . . . the China of the watercolor painting, the China of the civil service administration, and it's the China I don't relate to because I don't relate to China at all. I was born here. The other side of the coin, well, besides having all this great Chinese culture—we're very Americanized. And the proof of this is . . . well, we're engineers, we enter the professions . . . but these are all . . . as a mass . . . the apex of our achievement . . . places us in the role of being nothing but servants . . . servants to a larger machine, servants of Boeing, of Lockheed, of TRW [Thompson-Remo-Woolridge Corporation]. That we have not among us any who are known for pushing just something Chinese American, achieving on just Chinese American terms, the way the blacks have, Chicanos, the Indians. That we never really contributed to the culture.

What's wrong with a benign stereotype . . . we seem to live comfortably within it, under it?

Yes, it's benign, yet it becomes very frustrating to individual Chinese Americans, I think. The most insidious part of the stereotype is . . . not in so many words—they don't say this—but under analysis, looking for masculine characteristics, you find none. That the stereotype of the Chinese is utterly without masculine prerogatives. The only images of Chinese Americans—Chinese here under Western eyes—are waiters, laundrymen—okay, that's the old. And the new ones, you know, the good engineers, the nice doctors, all very nice, all very conservative . . . all passive. This makes them the ideal subject race, the ideal employees, the ideal servants.

Have you modified your thinking about "masculine prerogatives" when you were met with a street faction within Chinatown that displayed a hostile, aggressive posture toward you?

(laughter) Well, no. I've been beaten up, and I've been beaten up. (laughter) Ahh . . . I don't consider the American Legion more masculine or more manly because they beat me up. I think I was beaten up kind of Western style. Maybe I was lucky in that . . . that I didn't have one of these legendary forms of Oriental self-defense used on me. But what style of masculinity were they asserting? Styles of masculinity are important. If we consider ourselves to have no style of our own and are compelled, therefore, to imitate others—and this is something I think we've been taught from birth. We have to imitate English, or we have to imitate Chinese, though we're neither. Then, when

we hit puberty, to become men, we have to imitate the Chicanos or the blacks or the whites or somebody else. And this serves to keep us in Chinatown . . . because in imitation—you know there is something contemptible about imitation—and when that's the only option open to us . . . when we adopt a role, when we imitate, we are also taking on a certain amount of self-contempt. And this is something the culture itself has taught us to do here.

Make a distinction between imitation and assimilation.

Assimilation is a very general term. To my mind it's not just adapting or adjusting to the culture, it's being able to take certain traits, certain values of the culture and turn them into your own. And then, turn them into something else. Just what the blacks have done. Let's say they assimilated the English language. But they turned the language into something of their own. It's not just strictly American English. So that the language they speak is an act of assimilation in that it's based in English, but it is not the English that is generally spoken or acceptable in schools. It's simply Black English. The language communicates the unique black experience. And in turn it has affected the general culture. So it demands that the general culture assimilate some of the black experience.

How can you compare the black experience to the Chinese experience in America? I mean, haven't the unique Chinese institutions, language, etc., done a lot to keep the two cultures distinct?

Well, I think the continuity of Chinese culture from China to America is largely mythical. One of the institutions . . . the family . . . we're told the strong Chinese family—this is why the low crime rate and this is why Chinese are more obedient and passive. Well, you know, women were barred from entry, Chinese women were barred from entering California into this country. Until the turn of the century, when a few of them began to appear in noticeable numbers, then . . . at the turn of the century, there were twenty-eight men for every woman. This means that for the larger part of our history here, our population has been male. And I ask you, what kind of Chinese family do you maintain with just a transient male population? The other part of the mythical Chinese culture is that . . . well we are culturally passive. This is not so, and it isn't even so of Chinese American history: that between 1850 and 1905, there were Chinese in the Supreme Court of the United States or California protesting against city ordinances, state laws, union activities that they felt were unconstitutional. Going to the Supreme Court is far from passive resistance. The stereotypes, historically, of Chinese having no manhood, were false. The stereotypes of the continuity of Chinese culture between China and here were false. And this myth of Chinese culture has been used to confine us, to oppress intellectually, culturally, and to certainly suppress and restrain our individual development. I don't know that this was a calculated plot, but it's working out that way.

What has all this got to do with this play you've written? Does the play take the above into account?

Well, now, with this play, we dredge up a lot of these old stereotypes that are still operating here, now.

What's it called?

*Dear lo fan, fan gwai, whitey, honey babe.*² It's addressed to the whites, because I see that the stereotypes were not manufactured by the Chinese at all, but by the whites. The white point of view is—well, "You Chinese, you take care of yourselves. If you have any problems in Chinatown, why, that's your hang-up." I don't think that's so. If we have problems in Chinatown, it's largely the fault of the whites. They don't want to take responsibility, they don't admit to holding these stereotypes, and yet when you talk to them long enough, you see that they do. I think they have to be convinced that Chinese can speak for themselves. Remember that Mary Ellen Leary article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, in March, she says the most aggrieved minority in San Francisco cannot speak for themselves, and that's supposed to be us.³

Now in the play, we hit Mary Ellen Leary by name. I mean, we're obviously speaking English, or a kind of English, and at least enough so we can understand her. And we dress up in the play in grotesque imitation of her, just as whites have dressed up in grotesque images of us and we read what she has to say: That the Chinese can't speak English. If this doesn't make her nervous, well . . . there's nothing we can do but blow up everything. I think it will make her nervous.

Do you attack other writers who have written similarly about the Chinese in the play? Yeah. A Christian writer, a Rev. John L. Nevius who pushes very hard . . . in the positive sense . . . the stereotype of the Chinese who has no masculinity.⁴ He justifies this by saying that we are characteristically timid and docile and he rationalizes that this is good. Remember this is from the white point of view about a subject race, and he reasons that while the Chinese are deficient in active courage and daring, they are not in passive resistance. Now this attitude comes out more clearly in another writer we attack in the play, Jack London, great American author. If you're deficient in active courage and daring, this means that when you get whipped, you're not going to jump up and do anything about it. But in passive resistance, if you have a lot of passive resistance, you'll just sit there and endure it. Some things we'll endure and some things we won't, as a people, as an individual. I am not personally up to enduring

2. The play consisted of a series of skits written by students, staff, and faculty at San Francisco State College that attempted to skew racial stereotypes of Chinese Americans.

3. Mary Ellen Leary, "San Francisco Chinatown," *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1970, pp. 32-42.

4. John L. Nevius (1829-93) served as a Presbyterian missionary in China for over forty years and wrote *China and the Chinese* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1869).

much more white trash written about us. Over the past year, about eight articles have been written about us, in national magazines. Only two were written by Chinese—one by you, and they boxed that, they put a black border around it, as if to say gee whiz, Jeffery Chan's a real Chinaman.⁵ So again, you were put in the role of a servant, to a white man at that. And that's a crime.

Look at the other one by Min Yee in *Newsweek*, February 23rd.⁶ It was an article on Chinatown written by a Chinese American, it ran down old information about Chinatown but information that has not received national attention from a major news magazine. But what he did wrong was close his article with the admission that he was whitewashed. This is not just an individual confession, it was for us. You can see this if you were to pick up an article by a black writer on the ills of the black ghetto in Oakland, California. No black writer in his right mind would end such an article saying, I never had such problems, but then, I'm an Uncle Tom. Min Yee does just that by ending his article saying "but then I never had such problems because I was whitewashed." Here he is, our only national journalist in how many years, admitting that the only way to success is to become white. And he's not talking to Chinese, nor is he talking for them, but he's talking for whites and the Chinese are again eavesdroppers.

This play doesn't do that. Here we are, speaking as Chinese Americans. We hold our audience in contempt, the white audiences, and we are talking to the whites not about the problems in Chinatown as isolated incidents, but as problems that they were and are largely responsible for. Chinese America is larger than any one community, even larger than San Francisco's Chinatown. The identity problem that faces many Chinese Americans is centered around the myth that the only real Chinatown, the real Chinese America, is San Francisco's Chinatown. If they were all to act on that, the density rate would be a lot worse than it is now. As we travel with this play, I hope we'll give the Chinese themselves a larger view of Chinese America. That they should think of Chinese America not just in terms of Chinatown, San Francisco, but in terms of the whole country.

The opening passage of the play introduces what you would call a Chinese American folk song: Chink, Chink Chinaman, etc. I find that objectionable. Nobody calls me a Chink or Chinaman.

This is a white folk song that came out of the gold rush . . . and if we forget it, we've lost proof, documentary proof of white racism against the Chinese.

5. Jeffery Paul Chan's "Let 100 Problems Bloom" appeared in the *Los Angeles Times's* West magazine on January 4, 1970, p. 15, following a longer article by Kenneth Lamott, "The Awakening of Chinatown," pp. 6-14.

6. Min Yee, "Chinatown in Crisis," *Newsweek*, February 23, 1970, pp. 57-58.

This is a grotesque but not unfair analogy: ask the Jews, why talk about Auschwitz and the concentration camps? Just forget the names. But . . . they remember the names. Not for their own humiliation, but to remind Germany of their guilt. If we lose Chink, Chink Chinaman, then we've effectively buried white guilt.

Now dramatically, in the play, the puppet narrator is the character who represents the Chinese American controlled, being puppeted by the white culture. He sings Chink, Chink Chinaman. In the play, he encourages the audience to sing along with him. And once they get involved singing, we tell them to shut up. That this is a terrible song, that they've been singing it to us for a long time, for over a hundred years, and that tonight we're going to sing them this song . . . we don't want it anymore . . . it's their song . . . not ours. And the gesture is to insult the audience, to make them aware that the song is offensive. That it has offended us. The way to respond to that—the insults—was to say, that kid's stupid, don't pay any attention. Well, I don't think our kids have to put up with that anymore. I think we should try to encourage people who sing these songs to not sing them anymore. We are the right people to sing this song, to remind the whites, to document their white racism.

Do you think of yourself as a Chinese, Chinese American, Chinaman?

I do think of myself as a Chinaman. I'm fifth generation here. My great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather came over here to work on the railroad. He was called a Chinaman. He worked honorably as a Chinaman. He probably lost his life as a Chinaman. The whites, they laughed at that name. But, it's the only name I know my ancestors by and it's not my ancestors who made it a bad name. Great-grandfather was an honorable guy, as a Chinaman . . . that's what the whites called him. So . . . I'm a Chinaman. But, I do demand respect for the name. Not as a term of derision . . . in the same way that *black* used to be a term of humiliation . . . and they fight over it. But they've turned this word into an act of pride. And I think the term *Chinaman*, because it is our only connection with our ancestors, is something to be proud of. I think we should all be Chinamen.

SOURCE: *East/West*, April 22, 1970, pp. 5, 8.

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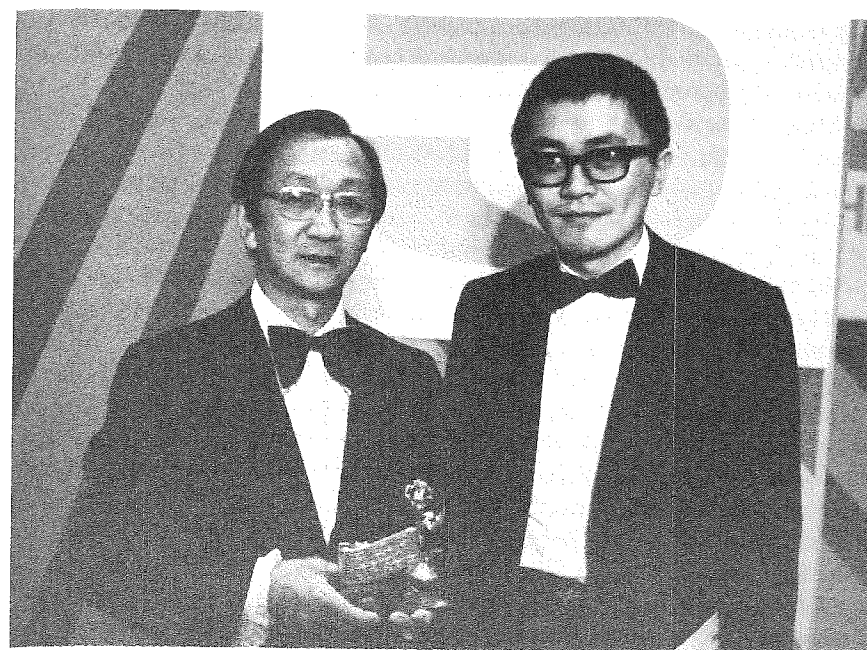
Major Education Problems Facing the Chinese Community (1972)

L. Ling-chi Wang

Following on the heels of the civil rights movement, Chinese Americans began to agitate for equal rights and social change in the areas of education, employment, housing, health, immigration, and services to youths and the elderly. In 1970 Chinese parents filed a class action suit (Lau v. Nichols) against the San Francisco Unified School District for denying their non-English-speaking children equal education according to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The lawsuit went through two appeals before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in its landmark decision of January 21, 1974, that the school district, in failing to provide special assistance to Chinese-speaking students, had denied them "a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public education program." Thus, in the midst of heated discussions in the nation over desegregation and busing, bilingual education programs were formally launched in the public schools.

One of the chief strategists behind *Lau v. Nichols* and a strong proponent of bilingual education was Ling-chi Wang, a doctoral student at the University of California, Berkeley, and the director of the Youth Service Center in San Francisco Chinatown at the time. Born in Xiamen, Fujian Province, Wang had emigrated as a student from Hong Kong in 1957 to study Semitic languages and literature at Princeton University. But after relocating to the San Francisco Bay Area, he found his true calling in political activism. Prior to making the following speech before the U.S. Senate Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, he had been instrumental in organizing a protest march in Chinatown to call attention to growing social problems in the community and in founding Chinese for Affirmative Action to deal with these problems. A social reformist at heart, Wang believed institutional and systemic change was key to improving the life chances of all Chinese Americans. Tackling the public schools was a necessary first step. Wang would go on to spearhead many other civil rights battles and head the Ethnic Studies Department at UC Berkeley.

Headed by Senator Walter F. Mondale, the Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity was formed to ensure the uniform application of school desegregation stan-



Ling-chi Wang (right) and Larry Lew (left) accepting the 1971 Emmy Award for the *Sut Yung Ying Yee* English-learning series produced by KPIX-TV and Chinese for Affirmative Action. (Photo by Connie Hwang)

dards and funding throughout the nation. Public hearings were held from the end of 1970 to early 1973 on all aspects of equal educational opportunity. Wang joined other educators and community activists in the San Francisco Bay Area on March 5, 1971, to apprise the Senate committee of desegregation efforts and the overall quality of education in their local public schools. Statistical tables and the Q & A discussion that followed his speech have been omitted.

Mr. Chairman, my name is L. Ling-chi Wang; I am the director of the Youth Service Center in Chinatown, an organization that works with delinquent and pre-delinquent school youth in the Chinese community in San Francisco. I welcome this opportunity to address this committee on what I consider major educational problems facing the Chinese community—problems facing the community which are deeply embedded in a traditional school system that has been denying equal and quality education to our youth.

In academic year 1969–70, there were 115,457 students attending the public schools in San Francisco. Of these, 16,574 or 14.4 percent were Chinese. . . .

These figures reflect a unique situation in San Francisco. The San Francisco Bay Area has the distinction of being the only area in the U.S. with a

high concentration of Chinese population. This, of course, is not the result of historical accident; rather, it is the result of the perpetuation of a policy designed to exploit and discriminate against the Chinese. It is not my intention here to recount that history nor is it my purpose to seek your sympathy. My intention, rather, is to present facts, historical and contemporary, as far as they are related to equal educational opportunity for the Chinese students. My hope is that your committee, and later, the Congress of the U.S., will act appropriately and promptly to correct the injustice of the past and restore our rights.

An understanding of the problems I am about to enumerate is inseparable from the past. I, therefore, will begin with some remarks on some historical efforts established to prevent the Chinese from attaining equal educational opportunity.

In 1860, the California State Legislature declared that "Negroes, Mongolians and Indians shall not be admitted into the public schools," but that separate schools might be established for their education. No segregated school, however, was established until 1887, when present-day Commodore Stockton School was founded. Thus, from the very beginning, the Chinese were denied access to education. The Legislature liberalized this policy in 1866 by providing that the restriction only applied to Negroes, Mongolians, or Indian children "not living under the care of white persons," and that children not so cared for "whose education can be provided in no other way," such as [a] segregated school, could attend a school for white children if the school board approved and if a majority of the white parents did not object. The separate school policy was upheld by the California Supreme Court in 1874 and remained in the law until 1947. In 1880 the Legislature amended its Political Code to provide local school boards with the power to exclude "children of filthy or vicious habits, or children suffering from contagious or infectious diseases." The San Francisco schools used this amendment to exclude the Chinese students. However, in 1885, the California Supreme Court held that Mamie Tape, a Chinese girl, was entitled to enter the San Francisco schools, pointing out also that "it is not alleged that she is vicious, or filthy, or that she has a contagious or infectious disease [*Tape v. Hurley*]." Nine days after the decision, the Code was amended to read, "When separate schools are established, Chinese or Mongolian children must not be admitted into any other school." This amendment was upheld by the Federal Court in 1902 [*Him v. Callahan*]. As I mentioned above, the segregated school law was not repealed until 1947, although admittance of Chinese students into white school gained wide acceptance during and after World War II.

I. THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM

Gaining admission into white schools, however, in no way guaranteed equal and quality education, nor did it improve significantly the opportunity of

Chinese students to compete with white students in higher education and in achieving equal employment opportunity in the society. I will now address myself to four areas of great concern to the Chinese community: (1) the language problems, (2) the disciplinary problems, (3) curriculum and the Chinese, and (4) discrimination against Chinese teachers and administrators.

No reliable figures are available for the number of non-English-speaking Chinese students in San Francisco because there has never been any standardized test designed to test Chinese students for their English language proficiency. Surveys, to date, on students' English language proficiency have been conducted crudely and unscientifically through information supplied by classroom teachers and on-site principals. Not only were the teachers not trained in the method of assessing students' language ability, [but] not all schools participated in these surveys and not all teachers took these surveys for their schools. Immigrant students, in most cases, are placed in classes commensurate with their ages, rather than their language ability and intellectual development. . . . It is important to note that 42 percent of the Chinese-speaking students in the elementary level are not receiving special instruction, 54.5 percent at junior high and 21.8 percent at senior high. It is also significant to note that among those registered as receiving special instruction in English, most are receiving at most 50 minutes of special instruction a day.

What do these figures mean? They mean quite simply that thousands of Chinese students at all levels are being placed in classes by their ages, sent through the school system and graduated sometimes not knowing the language; they mean that many of the non-English-speaking students are falling hopelessly behind their classmates; they mean that these students are spending anxious and frustrated hours in schools daily; they mean considerable numbers of them are truant and becoming potential drop-outs, a phenomenon least likely to occur among the Chinese.

The San Francisco Unified School District has tried to overcome this serious problem with 29 full-time and 15 part-time teachers over and above the regular school staffing. They hardly meet the needs of all non-English-speaking students. Besides, many of these teachers are untrained and unprepared to face this problem. They have been given little or no special curriculum designed to teach the Chinese.

In this connection, I would like to point out that the approach used by the Unified School District in teaching these Chinese-speaking students has been almost exclusively audio-lingual method, commonly known as the ESL method. This method is quite different from the bilingual approach spelt out under Title VII of the ESEA.¹ I have no objection to the use of ESL as a

1. Passed by Congress in 1967, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act recommended bilingual education programs as a way to improve the education of non-English-speaking schoolchildren.

means of instructing English to non-English-speakers, but I strongly object to the use of ESL as an end in itself. I am referring specifically to the exclusive use of ESL in such a way that the native language, culture and knowledge of these children are systematically suppressed and downgraded. The desire on the part of many well-meaning ESL teachers to help students in acquiring English as quickly as possible may be perfectly sincere and innocent. Yet in their innocence they are causing serious permanent damage to the overall growth of these same students. Exclusive use of the ESL method entertains no consideration of the children's native intelligence, provides no respect for their native language and culture and ignores and negates everything they know in their native language. Inadvertently, students are humiliated and abused. I am fearful that we are doing injustice to our Chinese- and Spanish-speaking children and I regret that, by ignoring and suppressing the Chinese language and culture, we are depriving American students of one of the richest cultural heritages brought to this country by immigrant children. I believe the best method of overcoming the language problem is the use of bilingual education as conceived by the Congress of the United States under Title VII of the ESEA.

In conjunction with the problem of teaching a new language, I would like to further point out another highly destructive and racist attitude current among many white teachers. I am referring to teachers who delight in publicly ridiculing and humiliating students speaking English with a slight Chinese accent. To them, no one speaks more accurate English than they do. They delight themselves in picking on the speech behavior of the Chinese students and finding fault in every student from the Chinese community. This attitude easily causes severe psychological damage to the students and greatly inhibits students from active participation in classroom activities. Little wonder Chinese students have gained the reputation of being docile, quiet and hardworking! I am further distressed by the prevailing attitude that persons speaking English with a Continental accent are generally looked up to as being sophisticated and upper class. I guess for these teachers, a Chinese accent destroys the English language while a Continental accent enhances its beauty.

These teachers, to me, are ignoring the simple fact that a language—any language—is merely a means of communication and that communication is by no means impeded by a slight accent. Besides, there is no such thing as a “standard” English.

II. THE DISCIPLINARY PROBLEM

As I mentioned above, the Chinese students hold a reputation of being docile, quiet and hardworking among white teachers in San Francisco. To them, Chinese students do not question or challenge the teachers. Unfortunately, this

stereotype often encourages teachers to do anything that they wish to foist upon their students. As a result, schools with predominantly Chinese students become the most sought after schools for experienced and often aging teachers with seniority. This peculiar personnel pattern soon led in Chinatown to the formation of all-white faculties, entrenched and rigid. A combination of the stereotype image of the Chinese students and the inflexible white faculty results frequently in severe disciplinary problems.

A case in point is Galileo High School. During academic year 1969–70, the 2,802 student body was made up of 1,535 Chinese (64.8 percent), 578 whites (20.6 percent), 444 blacks (15.8 percent), 145 Spanish-surnamed (5.2 percent) and a small number of other minorities. In spite of such a high percentage of Chinese students, Galileo had over 95 percent white and about 3 percent Chinese on its teaching and administrative staffs. Normally, this kind of condition at Galileo is described as a teacher's paradise because students are supposed to have no serious disciplinary problems, and teachers are not confronted with questions and challenges by students. Yet, what used to be unthinkable or rare among the “docile” Chinese students, such as absenteeism, suspensions, disciplinary problems, disciplinary transfers, drop-outs, and delinquent behavior, have become normal routine at Galileo. For example, during the academic year 1968–69, Galileo ranked second in the city with 433 suspensions. Between September 10, 1969, and January 23, 1970, Galileo actually achieved the distinction of being Number One in the number of suspensions among all high schools. (Galileo registered 566 suspensions; the second highest, Wilson, showed 322.) In the same period, Galileo also ranked among the highest in the number of disciplinary transfers. As for the delinquency problem, police figures on arrests and citations of Chinese juveniles indicated that the problem increased by 600 percent during the period 1964–69. Significantly, the Chinatown–North Beach Area Youth Council's study of police records reveals that delinquency rates among Chinese youths are lowest during the summer months, indicating a close correlation between school attendance and delinquency.

What has happened to the good old days in schools with predominantly Chinese students? Are the Chinese students behaving worse today than yesterday? The clue to these and other related questions rests on the fact that the Chinese community has changed considerably in recent years,² yet the white teachers and administrators in Chinatown schools remain largely unchanged. To begin, the personnel pattern at Galileo is not in tune with the times. The need to recruit Chinese teachers on the faculty was never taken

2. Later, during the Q & A discussion, Wang elaborated on the causes of juvenile delinquency—dislocated Chinese families and parental neglect due to the long hours of harsh working conditions, and frustrated youths who felt trapped by their lack of English-language ability, cultural differences, and inability to get out of Chinatown and find jobs.

seriously. Secondly, the stereotype image of the Chinese students became obsolete as Chinese students became more conscious of their ethnic origin and more aware of their rights. Furthermore, recent increases of non-English-speaking students brought new problems to the teachers who were not prepared to deal with them. Instead of accepting these changes and seeking new solutions, the school chose to ignore or suppress these problems. Result: frustration and anger among students and parents. More and more students became alienated from their white teachers, counselors and administrators. Failure to recognize these problems and to cope with them creatively and open-mindedly led the schoolteachers and administrators to resort to traditional tactics, that is, the use of disciplinary measures. Unfortunately, these repressive means could never resolve the educational problems at school. In fact, they merely aggravated the problems. And in the meantime, students are being denied an opportunity to receive equal and quality education.

III. CURRICULUM AND THE CHINESE

Another area of inequality in education is the curriculum. As one of the minority groups in the U.S., the Chinese have been given no fair treatment in school textbooks and in curriculum in general.

In textbooks, almost without exception, the Chinese are depicted variously as vicious, cruel, stupid, sneaky, untrustworthy, inscrutable, filthy, etc. These depictions came directly from historical attitude and treatment of the Chinese in California. Unfortunately, little or nothing is being done to remove these obviously racist portrayals of the Chinese. The effects of these misconceptions of the Chinese are tremendous and quite detrimental to the welfare of the Chinese people in the U.S. For example, many of our youngsters are brought up to be ashamed of their own people and to look down upon anything Chinese. They are taught exclusively white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class values in schools. Daily their Chinese value system is shot down or ridiculed by a value system presented to them as being superior. As a result, many have lost their self-respect and have developed a strong sense of inferiority complex.

Others try to lose their Chinese identity and tongue by rebelling against their parents and refusing to have anything to do with their parents. On account of this, many homes in our community are broken.

Equally destructive are the effects of these racist depictions on fellow students and the general public. Often times, Chinese become victims of public hostility and mistrust. We are denied equal employment and educational opportunity; we are prevented access to certain schools, recreational facilities and neighborhoods.

Looking now at the school curriculum, it is ironic to note that it has so little to do with one of the most important races and cultures of the world.

In terms of language and culture, the Chinese people have as much, if not more, to offer to the world. Yet our school curriculum continues to ignore the Chinese and their contribution to world civilization, denying, therefore, the American students the right to know more about China and her people and culture.

It is in this connection that I wish to plead for better and fairer treatment and coverage of the Chinese people, language and culture. It is high time that the Chinese heritage be rightfully restored to our students.

IV. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHINESE TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS

We come now to an area of discrimination which has considerable influence over the quality of education for the Chinese students. I am referring to the lack of Chinese teachers, counselors and administrators in the Unified School District.

It is common knowledge that urban public schools are in the midst of serious and seemingly unsolvable problems. Aside from perennial financial difficulties, public schools now face insurmountable problems dealing with school-community relations, counseling services, etc. All these problems, which we dealt with earlier, could be traced back to the problem of school administration and the quality of teaching staff. Unfortunately, students and communities, especially minority communities, are quite alienated from the schools at the moment. Certainly, one of the major causes of alienation is the failure of schoolteachers, counselors and administrators to relate with the needs of minority students and communities. This failure, I submit, is caused largely by the lack of minority school personnel. I will now comment on this subject from the Chinese perspective.

According to statistics compiled by the S.F. Unified School District, there were 115,457 students in the elementary, secondary and adult schools in academic year 1969-1970. Of these, 43,980 or 38.1 percent were white, 29,275 or 25.4 percent black, 17,026 or 14.7 percent Spanish surname, and 16,574 or 14.4 percent were Chinese. However, figures on teaching and administrative staff of the SFUSD for the same academic year show that 3,980 or 83 percent are white, 355 or 7 percent black, 121 or 3 percent Spanish surname and 204 or 4 percent Chinese.³

The most important cause for the present lack of Chinese teachers, counselors and administrators in the SFUSD is discrimination. It was only in the last ten years that Chinese faces first appeared on the staff of the SFUSD in small numbers. Discrimination takes many forms. Potential Chinese teachers are excluded basically for the following reasons: (1) qualified Chinese

3. According to Wang in the Q & A discussion following his speech, the San Francisco school district had a policy that the faculty ethnic composition should reflect the student population.

teachers are outrightly turned away, (2) potential teachers are discouraged from entering teacher's training programs, (3) unfavorable stereotypes such as "all Chinese speak English with a Chinese accent," "Chinese are mostly not qualified to teach," "Chinese possess no public speaking skill," "Chinese bilingual teachers are all bad teachers," "immigrant teachers don't know teaching methods," etc., and (4) qualified bilingual teachers are excluded as a potential threat to monolingual teachers. In addition, (5) absence of sound and objective criteria for hiring teachers, (6) cumbersome bureaucracy, (7) elaborate patronage system and (8) tradition-bound personnel management continue to block efforts to recruit and hire more Chinese teachers, counselors and administrators. . . .

Other things being equal, in an age when the quality and effectiveness of education depend heavily on the teacher's ability to understand and relate to students, parents and communities, various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, it is imperative that the composition of teaching staffs be reflective of the student body. The crying need for bilingual teachers and counselors is yet another reason for hiring more Chinese teachers.

It is time for the SFUSD to evaluate its recruiting, hiring and promoting policies, to reset its priorities on personnel matters and to pursue a policy that will bring justice both to qualified unemployed Chinese teachers in San Francisco numbering perhaps up to 300, and to the quality of education.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I hope something constructive will generate from these hearings. Thank you.

SOURCE: "Prepared Statement of L. Ling-chi Wang," Equal Educational Opportunity: Hearings before Select Committee on Equal Education Opportunity of the U.S. Senate, Part 9A, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, 1972, pp. 4229-35.

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On the Normalization of Relations between China and the U.S.

Prior to World War II, Chinese immigrants, subjected to white racism and political disenfranchisement in America, remained closely involved in China politics. Their involvement was also encouraged by the different political factions fighting for control of China and vying for their financial support. However, as their social and economic status improved after World War II and the United States severed diplomatic relations with "Communist China" in 1949, the Chinese began to stake their political future in America. At the same time, the Kuomintang regime in Taiwan, capitalizing on the anti-Communist atmosphere in the United States in the 1950s, seized the opportunity to dominate Chinatown politics. For the next two decades, the Chinese community would remain divided on the two-China issue.

In 1971, when the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) voted to admit the People's Republic of China to the UN, thus displacing the Nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan, Chinese Americans were at first cautious about expressing any jubilation. But the Chinese Six Companies, as seen below, was quick to condemn the vote and proclaim unwavering support for Chiang Kai-shek and "Free China" on behalf of the entire overseas Chinese community.

Soon after, President Richard Nixon made his historic visit to Beijing to begin normalization of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. As trade and traveling restrictions were lifted and full diplomatic relations with China resumed in 1979, Chinese Americans became less wary about expressing their opinions on the two-China issue. Gilbert Woo, whose anti-Kuomintang voice had been muzzled during the McCarthy period, was among the first to speak out for normalization. His editorial, which appeared in the Chinese Pacific Weekly, espoused a new perspective, one that paid no allegiance to the Nationalists or Communists but instead urged Chinese Americans to focus their attention on community issues closer to home—"home" meaning not China, but America.

PROCLAMATION BY THE CHINESE
SIX COMPANIES OF SAN FRANCISCO (1971)

On September 18, 1931, Japanese warlords invaded Shenyang in Manchuria. For fourteen long and arduous years, the Republic of China, as constituted by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, resisted the transgressions and massacres committed by Japanese troops and unstintingly gave up millions of human lives and innumerable material possessions to defend national territory and to struggle for the freedom of mankind. Finally, fascism was defeated and victory was achieved. In 1944, in order to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind,"¹ China participated in the Dumbarton Oaks Conference to create the United Nations and, on April 25, 1945, in the founding conference of all nations in San Francisco to draft the UN charter. Chapter 1, Article 1, states outright the purpose of the organization:

1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace . . .

And Article 2 says: "4. All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force . . ."

To affirm equal rights for people, Chapter 9, Article 55, Section C of the UN Charter further states: "[The UN shall promote] universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."

Chapter 5, Article 23, clearly stipulates that the Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council. With the outside world, each member nation must maintain peace and stop aggression. With its own people, it must respect human rights; protect fundamental civil liberties and racial equality, equality of the sexes, and the freedoms of speech and religion. These high ideals and noble goals are indeed worthy of our respect and esteem. From the beginning until now, the Republic of China, as a permanent member of the Security Council, has in all sincerity discharged its obligations and with unfailing diligence remained true to its promise. Yet the current session (the 26th) of the General Assembly actually approved a motion by Albania and other pro-Communist countries to admit into the United Nations Communist China, a renegade government, which, on June 25, 1950, dispatched armed troops into South Korea, thus starting the Korean War, and, in fighting with the United Nations, killed over 200,000 American young men.² This is the government which was roundly condemned as

1. Taken from the text of the United Nations charter.

2. According to an official source, 36,913 Americans died in the Korean War (Richard Kolb, "Killed in Korea: The Untold Story," *VFW*, June/July 2000, p. 23).

an invader by the General Assembly, and is currently still in Vietnam, destroying peace and continuing to kill Americans and Vietnamese. And on the Chinese mainland, this government has been responsible for the willful slaughter of 60 million innocent lives, the trampling of civil rights, the stripping away of the fundamental liberties and rights of 700 million people, and the persecution of Christians, Catholics, Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists by arrests and imprisonment, and by the wanton destruction of their churches and temples. This renegade government is in fact the public enemy of the entire Chinese race, and, in no way, does it represent our 700 million compatriots within and without China.

In allowing Communist China to replace the Republic of China in the organization and in the Security Council, the UN is in effect violating the goals and principles of its own Charter, ignoring morals and justice, kneeling to gangsters, and bowing to the devil. Such action is shameful as well as pitiful. A once noble and respectable organization, which our Republic, through the shedding of blood and the sacrifice of countless lives, had helped to create at a great price to defend world peace, the UN is now reduced to a nesting place for rats and snakes, a den of iniquity. This organization has lost its moral compass, its noble ideals, and its reason for existing. That is why our entire overseas Chinese community unanimously approves of the withdrawal of the Republic of China from the United Nations, supports the declaration in President Chiang's message that, "With respect to the passage by the current session of the General Assembly of the illegal resolution which violates the stipulations of the Charter, the government and the people of the Republic of China absolutely refuse to recognize its validity," and is prepared to struggle. We earnestly hope that every member of our community will remain loyal and steadfast to our cause, cultivate self-reliance and remain calm in the face of misfortune, and continue to support and defend international justice and world peace. With such firm conviction and unwavering resolve, we will surely be successful in our sacred mission to recover Mainland China and to rebuild our homes. Such is the intent of this proclamation.

October 28, 1971

SOURCE: *Young China Morning Post*, October 29, 1971, pp. 2, 8. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

A TURNING POINT IN CHINATOWN (1979)

Gilbert Woo

Today's Chinese American community has reached another turning point. Based on past experience, a transition period is not necessarily a peaceful and harmonious time. During the 1911 Revolution, the Revolutionaries and

the Reformists went through a period of strife. During the Northern Expedition days [1926-27], the Kuomintang and the Constitutionists had their share of skirmishes. Both times the *Young China Morning Post* took the sides of the Revolutionaries and the Kuomintang, respectively.¹ The first time, someone charged into the pressroom to cause trouble; the second time, the newspaper was boycotted by the Ning Yung District Association.² Then during 1949 when the Chinese mainland turned Communist, there was a bloody battle in the Chinese-American Citizens' Alliance auditorium.³ These were all unusual occurrences during transition periods.

This time, on the second day after the normalization of relations between China and the United States, a joint edition of the two newspapers in the city used the headline "A Peaceful Chinatown" when it reported the reaction of Chinatown.⁴ This of course referred to the situation on the surface, but the fact that the newspapers treated "A Peaceful Chinatown" as newsworthy showed that they had anticipated a certain degree of confusion, or at least had believed in the possibility of conflict.

There were reasons why Chinatown was completely peaceful during the first week. First, most people knew this event was going to happen, sooner or later. Granted, the news broke quite suddenly (which showed the incompetence of Kuomintang intelligence), but people who have been reading this newspaper were definitely not taken by surprise. Second, since the breakup of the Gang of Four, the negative feelings of the community toward

1. Both the Tongmenghui (Revolutionary Party), which called for overthrowing Manchu rule and establishing a republic in China, and the Baohuanghui (Chinese Empire Reform Association), which wanted to reform the imperial system from within, vied for the financial support of overseas Chinese communities. In 1911, the Tongmenghui succeeded in its goal and under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) emerged as a major political force in China in the early 1920s, accepting Communists as members. But after Sun's death in 1925, the Kuomintang split into left and right factions, with the right Kuomintang falling under the control of Chiang Kai-shek. During the Northern Expedition to rid the country of warlords, Chiang took the opportunity to kill off as many Communist members as he could, while in the United States, the Kuomintang competed against the Chinese Constitutionist Party (previously Baohuanghui) for control of the Chinese community. The *Young China Morning Post*, which was the official party organ of the Tongmenghui in 1910, became the voice of the Kuomintang right after the political split.

2. At the instigation of the Constitutionist Party, the Ning Yung Benevolent Association, which had the largest membership of Chinese immigrants, organized and sustained a boycott of the *Young China Morning Post* for eight years in retaliation for the newspaper's criticism of Ning Yung and the Chinese Six Companies.

3. During a celebration of the founding of the People's Republic of China at the Chinese-American Citizens' Alliance auditorium on the evening of October 9, 1949, the local Kuomintang leadership sent hoodlums to break up the meeting. The next day, Kuomintang elements passed out leaflets marking fifteen progressive Chinese men for death.

4. The two newspapers were the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco Examiner*.

the Communist government have begun to abate.⁵ Not a few community leaders have gone to the mainland to visit and to spend their vacation. Third, everybody realizes that it is local community affairs that have a direct bearing on us, and there is no point getting too serious about foreign politics. Consequently, the number of Chinese registering as voters is on the rise. Then there is the triumph of the residents of the Ping Yuen Housing Project over the Housing Authority.⁶ These are the best possible examples. In addition, many of the overseas Chinese are from Hong Kong, who read the newspaper purely for enjoyment and are rarely moved by inflammatory rhetoric to take action.

As a result, the first protest march against the normalization of relations was not sponsored by the Chinese community, but rather by Taiwanese students from the University of California, Berkeley. Those spreading propaganda at the corner of Jackson and Kearny Streets in Chinatown spoke Mandarin, not Cantonese—a rare sight. They may have said, "We have not come to Chinatown to demonstrate. We are here to protest to the Americans." But there were more television shots about the protest march by supporters of the Independent Taiwan Movement the next day than of the demonstration by Kuomintang students. One group was criticizing the United States for recognizing China, while the other was expressing support for the recognition of China (but calling for Taiwan independence), thus canceling each other out. Television news loves conflicting stories, and was particularly interested in the action of the Taiwan independence supporters, as if it was some kind of breakthrough that deserved special coverage. Such a development has never occurred before during past political struggles in Chinatown.

The biggest difference lies in the role played by the United States this time. Formerly, Chinatown political strife pitched Chinese against Chinese. The normalization this time is due to the intervention of the American government. The instruction to the Taiwan embassy and consulate to lower their flags came not from the "leftist" elements in Chinatown, but from the U.S. government. If the loyalists want to vent their anger, they should direct it toward President Carter. Actually, they did that, which was why almost every slogan posted in Chinatown by the loyalists accused Carter, thus helping to neutralize the tension in Chinatown, creating the "peaceful Chinatown" as described in the *Examiner*.

In reality, whatever changes there are following the normalization, except for the fact that the community leaders cannot have their photographs taken

5. The Gang of Four, consisting of Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, and Yao Wen Yuan, were arrested and blamed for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Their sentences ranged from death (later commuted to life in prison) to twenty years in prison.

6. The San Francisco Housing Authority Commission had just agreed to provide security guards at the Ping Yuen housing projects in Chinatown after a three-month-long rent strike triggered by the rape and murder of a nineteen-year-old female tenant.

any more with the Kuomintang consul-general, there is very little impact on everybody's daily life. Even if they cannot stop thinking about Taiwan, they can still eat Taiwanese food and travel to Taiwan to appreciate the one and only authentic Chinese culture. Moreover, they also have the chance to visit their relatives and go sightseeing in mainland China. Therefore, at this time when the sun is setting for the loyalists, neither urging the overseas Chinese to participate in their political activities nor resorting to trickery to win their sympathies is a practical plan.

In our local city elections, the political strength of the Chinese cannot be discounted. Every vote cast wields some power. But when it comes to international political changes, we can only express our opinion; we cannot influence the outcome. The Taiwan lobbyists in America were quite successful, and almost convinced the whole country to regard Communist China as a kind of malignance. Yet it took just one trip by [President] Nixon to turn the situation around. Chiang Ching-kuo [president of the Republic of China] was feeling free and easy when 70 percent of Americans opposed giving up Taiwan. Yet it took just one broadcast by Carter and all that remained of those 70 percent Americans was one small group of three or four individuals led by Goldwater.⁷ (They kept insisting that Taiwan should not be given up. But is Taiwan an American territory? And what is all this talk of "giving up" and "not giving up"? This kind of thinking is no more than a throwback to nineteenth-century colonialism.) One can see that these events are in no way influenced by us.

"There are circumstances beyond man's control." This may seem like a hackneyed saying, but it still holds true to a certain extent. By accepting this, Chinatown will weather this transition period without any difficulty.

SOURCE: *Chinese Pacific Weekly*, January 4, 1979. Translator: Ellen Yeung.

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7. Barry Goldwater, U.S. senator from Arizona and Republican presidential candidate in 1964, was known to be a conservative Republican and extreme anti-Communist.

Asian American Women and Revolution: A Personal View (1983)

Sadie Lum

The political ideologies of the antiwar, Asian American, and women's liberation movements in the 1970s heightened Chinese American women's awareness of racial, gender, and class oppression in their lives, inspiring many to become political activists. Some chose to participate in community service programs, others in mainstream politics, and still others, like Sadie Lum, chose the revolutionary route. As a member of the League of Revolutionary Struggle, she firmly believed that society's problems were caused by the capitalist system and that the solution was to organize the oppressed classes—workers and racial minorities—to bring socialism to the United States. As a woman, she also believed in the Chinese slogan "Women hold up half the sky"—in other words, that women should be allowed full and equal participation in the revolutionary movement.

In the following essay, originally published in a special Asian American women's issue of East Wind magazine,¹ Lum recalls an exciting period of political involvement and personal growth, when anything and everything seemed possible. At the same time, she remembers the difficulties she had juggling the multiple responsibilities of wife, mother, worker, and activist while at the same time struggling against male chauvinism at home and in the movement. How she was able to contribute to the revolutionary cause, deal with the personal conflicts, and come out of the process a stronger person is the underlying message of this retrospective essay.

The position and role that we, Asian women, occupy—our potential and how to tap and unleash our resources and full capabilities—is an important question to understand and address. Failure to do so will cripple the Asian peoples' struggle for full equality as well as harm the struggle for revolutionary change in the U.S.

1. *East Wind*, a progressive Asian American politics and culture magazine, was published from 1982 to 1989.