



Bulletin 簡報

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA MUSEUM

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Towards Equality highlights Chinese American Women of California

By Barbara Koh
CHSA CONTRIBUTOR

Essential to a child's right to public schooling, aid to war-torn China, bilingual education and the discovery of AIDS is one mutual element: one California Chinese American woman or more.

Individually and collectively, California's Chinese women are a powerhouse that's little-known and under-appreciated, and thus the subject of a Chinese Historical Society of America newest exhibition, *Toward Equality: California's Chinese American Women* traces them from 1850, when only seven of San Francisco's 4,000 Chinese residents were women, to the present, in which the city's assessor and two of its 11 supervisors are Chinese American women.

Stereotyped as prostitutes, women from "Oriental" countries and especially China were the target of the 1875 Page Act, which required of them photographs, written declarations and several interrogation sessions to prove they were not "lewd or immoral." It was the first US law to restrict immigration by race, and while reducing the number of incoming prostitutes, it kept out virtually all Chinese women. In 1882 during the few months before the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted and enforced, about 39,600 Chinese entered the country, just 136 of them women.

The Chinese American fe-



DESIGN & ILLUSTRATIONS: AMY LAM, CHSA

Clockwise, top: Mary Tape, Tye Leung Schulze, March Fong Eu, & Lonnie Young are among the influential women highlighted in *Towards Equality: California's Chinese American Women*.

male population rose gradually from births and starting in the 1940s, from the loosening of immigration restrictions. Though relatively small in number, the women were resolved and remarkable. Immigrants Mary and Joseph Tape in 1884 sued when their US-born daughter was barred from enrolling in an all-white San Francisco school; the California Supreme Court determined that the girl was entitled to public education. (San Francisco's school board scrambled to create the segregated Chinese Primary School in Chinatown the following year). The Square and Circle Club, launched by Chinese women in the mid-1920s, raised funds for their ancestral country when it was pummeled

by natural disasters, famine, war and political upheaval. The organization expanded to help US Chinese communities as well, and exists to this day. In 1938 Chinatown garment worker Sue Ko Lee founded a union of her colleagues and led a 15-week strike of National Dollar Store in San Francisco, which conceded higher wages.

Modern heroines include Wai Kam Lau, whose 1974 US Supreme Court case on behalf of her son required San Francisco's schools to provide language assistance and bilingual education to non-English speakers; *Lau v. Nichols* is a landmark that all law students study. Flossie Wong-Staal's name is perhaps less familiar, but the UCLA alumna

and UC San Diego professor emeritus identified HIV as the cause of AIDS in 1983. She was also the first researcher to clone HIV.

California's Chinese American women are as diverse as they are accomplished. The exhibit also profiles politicians, Chinese opera stars and World War II air force pilots and shipyard workers, among others. Come and explore who got married out-of-state to avoid California's anti-miscegenation law, the namesake of San Francisco's Alice Fong Yu Alternative School, the first Chinese American woman in Congress, and a dental-hygienist-by-day and nightclub-dancer-by-night. *Toward Equality* runs Dec. 1 through June 2, 2019.

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Taiwanese dulcimer performer and composer Hannah Hsieh will play select songs from Chinese and American cultures while premiering her own compositions based on her experiences in California.



JANUARY 24, 2019 @ CHINESE CULTURE CENTER, 750 KEARNY ST, SF

Last Boat Out of Shanghai with Helen Zia

Community activist and author Helen Zia will discuss her latest publication, which chronicles the real life stories of four people who were trying to escape China during the 1949 Communist Revolution.

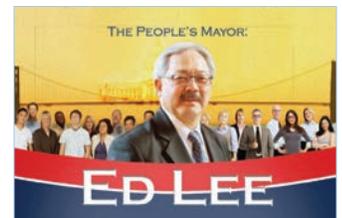


Courtesy Helen Zia

FEBRUARY 11, 2019 @ HERBST THEATRE, 401 VAN NESS AVE, SF

The People's Mayor: Ed Lee Film Premiere

CHSA will premiere the new documentary about late Mayor Ed Lee, offering guests the opportunity to meet director Rick Quan.



Courtesy Rick Quan

FEBRUARY 16, 2019 @ CHSA, 965 CLAY ST, SF

"Stepping into Your Story": Workshop with visual artist Cynthia Tom

Mixed-media artist Cynthia Tom will guide participants through this workshop using intuitive art-making techniques to share participants' personal stories.



Courtesy Cynthia Tom

FEBRUARY 23, 2019 @ CHSA, 965 CLAY ST, SF

Year of the Pig: Chinese New Year Celebration at CHSA

Celebrate the Year of the Pig at CHSA's annual Lunar New Year celebration. Featuring lion dancing; poetry reading by Flo Oy Wong, Nellie Wong, and Genny Lim; art making; and a book signing with *Gum Moon* author Jeffrey Staley.



Event times & ticketing TBA.

Visit chsa.org/events for event details.

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- Self-guided activity of CHSA's new exhibit, *Toward's Equality: California's Chinese American Women*

Book your group visit today! Email groups@chsa.org, call (415) 391-1188 x101, or visit chsa.org/group-visits

CHSA Reclaiming History for 150th Anniversary of Transcontinental Railroad

By Barbara Koh
CHSA CONTRIBUTOR

In May 1969 at Utah's Promontory Summit, a three-hour ceremony saluted the 100th anniversary of the transcontinental railroad's completion—where tycoon Leland Stanford had pounded a golden spike to join Central Pacific Railroad's line from the west and Union Pacific Railroad's line from the east. With little notice and no explanation, CHSA Board President Philip Choy's five-minute allotment was eliminated from the centennial program. The keynote speaker was Transportation Secretary John Volpe. To the audience of 20,000, among them senators, historians and John Wayne, Volpe trumpeted, "Who else but Americans could drill ten tunnels in mountains 30 feet deep in snow? . . . Who else but Americans could have laid 10 miles of track in 12 hours?"

Americans couldn't and didn't, Choy told reporters and officials. Those were the feats of Chinese migrants, who were not Americans and for decades were prohibited from becoming Americans. A scathing, front-page *San Francisco Chronicle* account of the ceremony focused on its "forgotten men." The centenary celebration "highlight[ed] the exclusion of Chinese from national memory," says CHSA board member emeritus Connie Young Yu, who attended and whose great-grandfather was a railway worker.

Architect-author Choy, an early and long-serving board member of CHSA, in the 1960s steered the young organization to research the 12,000 Chinese who, with hand tools and rudimentary explosives, constructed Central Pacific's line from Sacramento to Promontory. A Chinese crew laid 10 miles of track in a day, which remains a record, according to the National Park Service. Moreover, the Chinese were paid less than white workers and had to pay for their own food, lodging



TOP: COURTESY CONNIE YOUNG YU. ABOVE: COURTESY RICK QUAN

Top: In 1969, a CHSA delegation, led by Philip Choy, placed a commemorative plaque in Utah honoring Chinese railroad workers with Chinese Consul General Tung-hua Chou. **Above:** Railroad worker descendants at the U.S. Department of Labor ceremony honoring Chinese railroad workers in 2014.

and tools.

But after the railway's completion, Chinese were scapegoated as economic competitors and attacked in dozens of towns. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, in effect until 1943, outlawed the immigration of Chinese skilled and unskilled laborers, barred those in the US from citizenship, and was the first significant federal law to ban a specific ethnicity or nationality from immigrating. Chinese "were doing the impossible" on the railway, Yu says, "and then they were excluded."

The transcontinental and its aftermath demonstrate that the nation does not always live up to the ideals personified by the Statue of Liberty. This includes the Trump administration, Yu says, which "says 'immigrant' is a dirty word."

For the 150th jubilee, CHSA wants to take

the railroad's sesquicentennial beyond ceremony, to make it a milestone in the rightful recognition of Chinese in the U.S. At the May 8-11, 2019 Golden Spike Conference in Utah organized by Chinese rail workers' descendants, CHSA will unveil *Voices from the Railroad*, a book Yu co-edited that features eight individuals hired by Central Pacific in the 1860s. It will also screen filmmaker Barre Fong's documentary about the late Choy's quest to promote the legacy of Chinese pioneers.

Presenting its latest discoveries and sparking discussion about the Chinese migrant workers of 150 years ago "is a way of restoring pride and honoring our ancestors" and "putting this narrative into American history," says Yu. "We're doing this for [all] Americans."



The CHSA Bulletin is published multiple times throughout the year. To contribute articles about Chinese American community and historical news and events, please submit articles to info@chsa.org.

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Donate Today to Support CHSA in the New Year & Beyond!

We're excited to announce that in 2019, we will engage in a number of projects that honors our history. 2019 will also mark the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, and we will commemorate this significant anniversary in multiple venues across the country.

Donate to CHSA today at chsa.org/support, or by calling (415) 391-1188 or emailing info@chsa.org. Gifts of \$1,000 or more will receive special recognition in CHSA's Legacy Gallery. Employer-matches are welcomed; ask your employer or contact us about how to participate. All contributions are tax deductible (Federal tax ID #94-67122446).