
Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown, Taken by James Wong Howe, 1944

BANC PIC 1996.014 -- PIC

The Bancroft Library



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Collection Summary

Collection Title: Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown, Taken by James Wong Howe,

Date: 1944

Collection Number: BANC PIC 1996.014 -- PIC

Extent: 29 b&w photographic prints, 21 x 26 cm. or smaller. 29 digital objects

Photographer: James Wong Howe

Repository: The Bancroft Library. University of California, Berkeley.

Berkeley, California 94720-6000

Languages Represented: English

Access

Collection is available for use.

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item] *Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown*, BANC PIC 1996.014 --PIC, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Digital Representations Available

[Digital representations of selected original pictorial materials are available in the list of materials below.](#) Digital image files were prepared from selected Library originals by the Library Photographic Service. Library originals were copied onto 35mm color transparency film; the film was scanned and transferred to Kodak Photo CD (by Custom Process); and the Photo CD files were color-corrected and saved in JFIF (JPEG) format for use as viewing files.

Acquisition Information

The Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown collection was purchased in 1996.

Biography

James Wong Howe was born Wong Tung Jim on August 28, 1899 in Kwantung (Canton), China. He moved to the United States at age 5. After pursuing a career as a professional boxer in the Northwest, Howe moved to Los Angeles and became a delivery boy for a commercial photographer. In 1917 Howe entered the Hollywood film industry and soon became an assistant cameraman, working with such notable directors as Cecil B. DeMille. In 1922 he became a director of photography and quickly established a reputation as an inventive and meticulous craftsman. Initially known as James Howe, his Chinese name was added by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in hopes that a more exotic-sounding name appearing on film credits would enhance publicity for both Howe and the studio. In industry circles, Howe acquired the nickname of Low Key Hoe for his distinctive application of low-key photography. Howe also pioneered the use of deep focus and the hand-held camera. Howe won Academy Awards for his cinematography for *The Rose Tattoo* (1955) and *Hud* (1963). Throughout his career Howe was also active as a still photographer. James Wong Howe died in 1976.

Other notable films featuring the cinematography of Howe include *Peter Pan* (1924), *The Thin Man* (1934), *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937), *They Made Me a Criminal* (1939), *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), *Body and Soul* (1947), *He Ran All the Way* (1951), *Come Back Little Sheba* (1953), *Picnic* (1956), *The Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958), and *Funny Lady* (1975).

Scope and Content

The Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown collection contains 29 photographs taken by James Wong Howe during World War Two documenting the assimilation of Chinese Americans. The collection is only a portion of a larger group of photographs commissioned by *Look* magazine in 1944 "to get behind the tourist front" of San Francisco's Chinatown. The collection features various workers, children, soldiers, and youth in an attempt to illustrate the degree to which Chinese Americans had been assimilated into mainstream American culture and were thus supportive of the United States' war efforts. Included among the photographs are scenes of Chinese American home life, schooling, recreation, dining, and work places such as a newspaper press, child care center, telephone switchboard, construction site, pawn broker, and various offices.

The original *Look* article, *Chinatown, San Francisco* (issued December 26, 1944; pp. 22-27), explains the magazine's choice of Howe as the photographer for the article, gives a brief history of Chinese Americans, makes a claim for the Chinese American allegiance to the United States' war cause, and presents a series of 18 fully captioned photographs taken in Chinatown. Though most of the prints in the collection are uncaptioned with the exception of classificatory information, some include hand-written versions of the captions found in the *Look* article. The series arrangement of the present finding aid is generally based on the subject headings found on the print versos. Some information contained in the bracketed captions, though not included on the versos, is taken directly from the *Look* captions. Captions in the container listing marked with an asterisk (*) were included in the original *Look* article.

In addition to the captions and subject classifications, the print versos also contain various numberings and a hand stamp.

Series 1: Chinese Americans—Working, No. 1-2

Series 2: Chinese Americans—Women, No. 3-8

Series 3: Chinese Americans—Men, No. 9-13

Series 4: Chinese Americans—Children, No. 14-22

Series 5: Chinese Americans—Miscellaneous, No. 23-29

Series 1: Chinese Americans -- Working.





:1 [Men at newspaper press, Chinese Times. Paper in photograph dated March 8, 1944.] 

<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf5779p29z>




:2 [Men at newspaper press, Chinese Times. Paper in photograph dated March 8, 1944.] 

<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf900010jj>








Series 3: Chinese Americans -- Men.

- :9 [Man leaving office of the Consulate General of the Republic of China.] 
<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf2p3005th>
- :10 Chinatown's American Legion, Cathay Post, No. 384, has veterans of both this & the last wars. Present membership of 450 includes holder of the Croix de Guerre & the Distinguished Service Cross. After war, enrollment is expected to pass 1,500.*  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7d5nb6gq>
- :11 Pin-ups provoke the same soldier emotions in any language. Note how girls' legs have been elongated.* 
<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf9489p3k5>
- :12 [Fong Fong Hoo, owner of ice cream parlor, decorating cake. Cf. No. 26.] 
<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf6c6008g2>
- :13 [Artist.]  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf4p30081p>

Series 4: Chinese Americans -- Children.

- :14 **Girl Scouts have two troops in Chinatown. Ruby Kimlau, daughter of American Legion Post Commander.***
 <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3s2007wg>
- :15 **[Girl and teacher at blackboard.]**  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf9f59p4d1>
- :16 **[Teacher with pupils at blackboard.]**  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf7m3nb5mm>
- :17 **[Pupils writing at desks.]**  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf8m3nb6zk>
- :18 **[Pupils writing at desks.]**  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf5199p18n>
- :19 **[Pupils writing at desks.]**  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf429007fq>
- :20 **[Boys making kites.]**  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3c600792>
- :21 **[Boys with basketball. Clay Street playground.]**  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3q2nb41r>
- :22 **[Beverly Chang, four years old, with ice cream cone.]***  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf2f59p0bw>

Series 5: Chinese Americans -- Miscellaneous.

- :23 [Man and woman on sofa.]  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ff6t1nb5tq>
- :24 [Woman with infant at child care center.]  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ff300006sr>
- :25 Sunday afternoon at the Shee Wong Chan's is much like that of any other American family. Grandpa Chan is well established behind the Sunday papers, as are his grandchlidren.* 
<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ff0h4nb1h9>
- :26 Like other American boys they patronize ice cream parlors. Owner is Fong Fong Hoo.* 
<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ff9b69p47s>
- :27 [Party at dining table.]  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ff8d5nb7bf>
- :28 [Unidentified hand with chopsticks.]  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ff8c60109p>
- :29 Customer at pawnbroker's shop remains hidden, slips camera through window for the Chinese consider it a disgrace to pawn anything.*  <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ff9v19p4mr>