

Resources for Learning More About Our Chinese American History and Culture

Compiled by Allison Branscombe

The enclosed newsletter from New England's FCC contains many valuable recommendations for learning about China. Since we are a Chinese American family, we have all found it valuable to know about Chinese American history and culture, through many of the books listed below. Herewith are my recommendations for adults and kids, including some contemporary novels and stories, which help to illuminate and transmit Chinese culture and traditions. Many of the books below relate the early struggles of the Chinese in California.

Non-fiction for adults and mature teens

- *Bitter Melon: Inside America's Last Rural Chinese Town.* Gillenkirk and Motlow. 1987. 140 pgs. Also the subject of a PBS documentary, the story of the California Delta town of Locke.
- *Bound Feet and Western Dress.* Pang-Mei Natasha Chang. 1996. 215 pgs. A remarkable memoir of an accomplished woman.
- *California's Chinese Heritage: A Legacy of Places.* Thomas A. McCannold. 2000. 200 pgs. History of hundreds of California towns in all 56 counties.
- *Chinese American Portraits: Personal Histories, 1828-1988.* Ruthanne Lum McCunn. 1988. 174 pgs. Over 20 individual portraits tell of living in a period of turbulence and massive change. Contains good bibliography, summary of anti-Chinese laws.
- *Chinese Gold: The Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region.* Sandy Lydon. 1985. 550 pgs. A detailed account of the contributions and lives of the Chinese in this region of California. Many photographs give voice to the story.
- *Chopstick Childhood in a Town of Silver Spoons.* Nona Mock Wyman. 1997-99. 280 pgs. Heart tugging story of orphaned Chinese girls growing up at the Ming Quong Home in Los Gatos, CA.
- *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans.* Jean Pfaelzer. 2007. 432 pgs. A must-read history of ethnic cleansing in America: a carefully researched retelling of the atrociously inhumane treatment given many Chinese residents in the mid to late 1880s and the legal framework that encouraged these actions.
- *Everything You Need to Know About Asian American History and Culture.* Lan Cao and Himilce Novas. 1996. 366 pgs. In question and answer form, this book is an easy read, including much on the political history involving China, Japan, and the US.
- *Fifth Chinese Daughter.* Jade Snow Wong. 1945, 1978 and 1989. 246 pgs. An exceptionally moving autobiography of a girl growing

up in Chinatown, pulled between traditional values, discrimination and American ways as she pursues her career and becomes a recognized leader. Contains bibliography on other accomplished Asian women.

- *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940.* Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim and Judy Yung. 1980. 176 pgs. The poems and stories of those who were held at Angel Island. Written in Chinese and English.
- *Sam Fow: The San Joaquin Chinese Legacy.* Sylvia Sun Minnick. 1988. 300 pgs. Easy to read textbook style treasury of information on Chinese American history in California.
- *San Francisco's Chinatown.* Judy Yung and the Chinese Historical Society of America. 2006. 126 pgs. A compelling photo-history.
- *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco.* Judy Yung. 1995. 370 pgs. A masterful contribution.
- *The Chinese Community of Stockton.* Sylvia Sun Minnick. 2002. 128 pgs. A photographic history.
- *The Chinese in America.* Iris Chang. 2003. 496 pgs. How Chinese immigrants forged an identity and a successful presence in America.
- *The Lonely Queue: The Forgotten History of the Courageous Chinese Americans in Los Angeles.* Icy Smith (Sui Bing Tang). 2000. 195 pgs. A photohistory in English and Chinese, includes a chronology of laws and key dates in history affecting Chinese Americans.

Historical fiction and non fiction for kids

- *Angel Island Prisoner 1922.* Helen Chetin. 2002. 64 pgs. How it felt to live on Angel Island for 30 women and children, movingly told. If you only get one book on Angel Island, get this one. Written in English and Chinese. 10+.
- *The Chinese Immigrants 1850-1900.* Kay M. Olson. 2002. 30 pgs. Easy to read supplement of California history. 9-14.
- *Coolies.* Yin, 2003. 40 pgs. The story of two brothers who worked on the Transcontinental Railroad, written from their point of view. Contains a useful bibliography. 10+.
- *Good Fortune: My Journey to Gold Mountain.* Li Keng Wong. 2006. 134 pgs. An autobiographical account of coming through Angel Island and the awful challenges of living in the Bay Area after immigrating. 10-16.