


To Fight, and to Find Ourselves
--- Formation of an Identity through Chinese Americans' World-War-II Military Experiences

By
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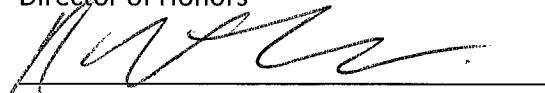
Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For Honors in History

April 2012

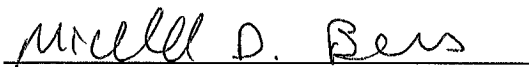
On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on 5/1/12
we, the undersigned, recommend that the candidate be awarded honors
in History.



Director of Honors



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Third Reader

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Introduction

The United States experienced enormous social transformations in attitudes toward race during and following World War II. While breaking the shackles of racism on the home front, it fought hard for peace on a global stage. The country received innumerable refugees and immigrants, and at the same time deepened integration among its populace. Historians generally acknowledge that Chinese Americans started to be an active social force in mainstream American society in the 1940s, almost one and a half centuries after their first arrival, because the severe test of the war made it possible for Chinese Americans to enter a higher social class. In supplement to earlier studies, this thesis aims to explore further the influence of World War II on Chinese Americans' self-identification by focusing on Chinese-American military personnel. It provides possible explanations for the varied experiences Chinese Americans had as U.S. soldiers, the changes they underwent at home and abroad, and the formation of their new identity that has characterized them for years after the war, and maybe even now.

The wartime experiences of racial discrimination against African Americans and Japanese Americans have already been studied in depth, but not the life of Chinese Americans.¹ Historians interested in Chinese Americans in World War II, most of whom are Asian Americans if not necessarily Chinese Americans, tend to treat this period simply as a transitional chapter in a thick book of Chinese-American history that runs from the early 1800s to the present without specific interest in the World-War-II period. Primarily relying upon oral history materials, they write their works more as memoirs than as academic

¹ In WorldCat.org: The World's Largest Library Catalog, there are 6,357 items listed under "Japanese American World War II" and 3,842 under "African American World War II." In comparison, there are only 1,229 items under "Chinese American World War II."

analysis. Undeniably, the collections of interview transcripts, photos, short essays and the like reveal some inspiring anecdotes. The narrative style of such writing, however, prevents oral history works from fully explaining how World War II affected the relationship between America and its people, making the studies of Chinese Americans during the war more like an effort to record and remember the past than an effort to interpret and understand it. The opinions of mainstream Americans are also underrepresented, as are the views of people in China, because Chinese Americans are the sole contributors to the accounts. This points to the need for a more focused yet more comprehensive analysis of Chinese Americans in World War II. The related oral history works, which are rich in details and full of vivid descriptions, are gold mines of materials for this research.

As a group which had the most direct contact with both native Chinese and mainstream Americans during World War II, Chinese-American military personnel are ideal subjects for this study. They are highly representative of both World-War-II America and the Chinese-American community in particular. The composition of their group was typical of the composition of the Chinese population in America. Their role in the military resembled their role in society. What they noticed and learned in barracks, on fields and overseas in China with other Americans, such as the prevailing ideology and beliefs in America and the “authentic” Chinese culture and society, travelled to Chinatowns with them when they were discharged. Compared to Chinese Americans who came to know America by working in integrated plants, shipyards and factories, service people were more deeply immersed in interracial communications as they received training, spent some leisure time and fought for their lives shoulder by shoulder with Americans of other ancestries. Their experiences not

only changed them but also altered the whole path of development of Chinese Americans. Unfortunately, this important group of people did not receive much attention and their experiences and influences remained veiled to the public. Chinese historical societies in California made tributes to Chinese-American World-War-II veterans from their areas, and historians wrote about atypical individuals or groups of Chinese Americans' military careers. These works, sadly, never cover the whole group of Chinese-American military personnel and they are still descriptive narrations rather than analytical studies.

Rather than simply telling stories about an important but neglected group, this thesis uses a variety of sources and analyzes the materials from different angles, trying to illustrate not only what a Chinese-American identity was but also how Chinese Americans became who they were. It uses both oral histories and contemporary World War II sources, and reads these materials from a new perspective. Chapter One introduces background information about Chinese Americans prior to the war. First, the long-term unfriendly treatments the U.S. governments gave to Chinese immigrants reflect the mainstream attitudes at that time and explain Chinese Americans' motives for joining the military. Second, the diverse subgroups of Chinese Americans, resulting from the very history of Chinese immigration to America, forecast the different feelings and reactions those soldiers had in the war. Chapter Two lays emphasis on Chinese-American military personnel's interactions with each other and with people in China. It shows that, despite the apparent Chinese heritage that singled those soldiers out and grouped them together in America, they each possessed the distinct characteristics of the regions, either American states or Chinese provinces, they came from. They also realized their close connections to America, which

were unnoticeable at home but conspicuous when they were in China. Chapter Three exposes the dilemma Chinese-American soldiers were caught in when interacting with Americans of other ancestries, mainly Caucasians: they were more accepted but were still treated differently from “real” Americans. The integration of Chinese Americans into the mainstream, at least in the beginning, was active only on the Chinese-American side but quite passive on the side of American society. An epilogue about life at the end of the war further demonstrates the changes in the Chinese-American identity because of World War II.

All these facts and analyses lead to the conclusion that Chinese Americans, who were eager to become “true” Americans, found themselves quite Americanized when interacting with Chinese people but were still made aware of their racial background, which was hard to erase, by mainstream Americans. Joining the American military, Chinese Americans fought for their country and learned who they were. They were no longer “immigrant Americans in a Chinese enclave” or “Chinese living in America” but “Americans with Chinese heritages.” Through the war, this new identity was formed.

Chapter One: Chinese on Pre-World-War-II American Land

When flames of war sparked on the other side of the ocean in Europe, the ice between America and the Chinese people on its land showed few signs of melting. The U.S. policies and judicial cases carried on the half-century-long hostility against Chinese immigrants and even their children, causing a strong feeling of insecurity within the Chinese-American community. To make things worse, the awareness of being unwelcomed and looked down upon confined Chinese Americans to the marginalized areas of neighborhoods, social lives, and careers. At the same time, the composition of the Chinese population in America approaching World War II was more complex than most historians described. Diverse origins and living conditions resulted in varied degrees of Americanization among Chinese Americans, forming three major groups that held different views of and reactions to their military experiences.

The complex relationship between Chinese Americans and their adoptive country, as well as the distinct characteristics of the three subgroups of Chinese Americans, forecasted mainstream Americans' reluctant but gradual acceptance of their new brothers and sisters. They also predicted Chinese Americans' passionate and persistent endeavors to make their way into the mainstream since Americans' official involvement in World War II. This chapter attempts to sort out how the century-long history of Chinese immigration to America and the particular conditions of the Chinese-American community prior to the war affected Chinese Americans' military careers. It analyzes several early U.S. governmental policies and legal cases concerning Chinese immigration in order to reveal the American authority's attitudes at that time and shed some light on Chinese Americans' motives for joining the

military. It also deals with the different subgroups of Chinese Americans, highlighting the characteristics that would play important roles in the ensuing war efforts.

Policies and Trials Reflecting and Affecting Prewar Interactions

Abstract as the concept of government can be, the U.S. government exerted concrete influences on the interactions between Chinese immigrants and American people through public regulations and court trials. These documents suggested the social opinions of Chinese Americans over the years and created certain expectations in Chinese Americans' reactions when time came for them to prove their qualification for American citizenship.

Like immigrants from other countries, the Chinese came to America, a land known for its openness and diverse opportunities, for better fortunes. Decades after the trade relations had begun between the New World and China, the first Chinese sailors and merchants arrived in New York City in the early 1800s. The 325 men lured to San Francisco by the 1848 California Gold Rush, however, were the first group of significant size to stay in America.² The Californian authorities encouraged them to come to provide inexpensive labor. From then on, Chinese people poured into America at a steadily accelerating pace. During the Civil War and after, the Chinese immigrants were widely accepted as an inexpensive labor force. In 1870, the majority of the Chinese in America were miners or contracted laborers, which respectively made 36.9% and 20.4% of the total Chinese-American population.³ By 1880, when other Asian groups were so limited in number that few governmental records were

² Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 28.

³ Francis A. Walker, *U.S. Census: Population and Social Statistics (1870)*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872) Volume I, Table XXIX, 704-715. Retrieved on February 12, 2012 from <<http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1870.html>>

made, the Chinese population in America increased to 105,465⁴. The newcomers, most of whom came from Canton province in southern China, made up about one tenth of the population in California.⁵ Apart from the hardship of making a living in China, the support to labor migration from the U.S. administrations was crucial in bringing in Chinese people to America. These Chinese immigrants, however, were not eligible for citizenship. Unable to become Americans, they retained a strong link to China, sending money home to build schools and hospitals whenever they could. The booming of the Chinese population in America did not last long. When the time came that too many people were striving for limited resources in the post-gold-rush America, the Chinese, who kept rushing to the country, were no longer welcome. Though they greatly aided the development of California and many other states they worked in, Chinese Americans were falsely believed to be responsible for the failing economy. Unofficial segregation first took place in mining districts, later extending to urban areas and becoming city regulations. The segregated Chinese Americans were soon denied rights and access to public facilities that other taxpayers enjoyed.⁶ The nightmare did not end until World War II came to America.

The situation for Chinese immigrants in America was worst in the late nineteenth century, when the Chinese Exclusion Act went into effect. Composed mainly of healthy bachelors, the Chinese-American community was young and strong and had no children in America that needed to be taken care of. They could thus provide cheap labor without using

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, "Comparison of Asian Populations during the Exclusion Years." Retrieved on February 12, 2012 from <http://www.udel.edu/readhistory/resources/2005_2006/summer_06/hsu.pdf>

⁵ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Asian for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States: 1870 to 1890," U.S. Census Bureau, released on September 13, 2002; "California – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1850 to 1990," U.S. Census Bureau, released on September 13, 2002. Retrieved on February 12, 2012 from <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>>

⁶ California Department of Parks and Recreation Office of Historic Preservation, *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California*, (1988), retrieved online on February 12, 2012 from <http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/5views/5views3c.htm>

any of the government infrastructures such as hospitals and schools. This made these former help-hands from China to be the biggest competitors in the job market in local people's eyes.⁷ Made a United States federal law on May 6, 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act made it impossible for Chinese to travel to America on "work visas." Under this law, even masters of vessels could be convicted and punished by fine and/or imprisonment for knowingly bringing Chinese laborers to America.⁸ Though this act confined its subject to only the prospective Chinese laborers, it still greatly impaired the development of the Chinese population in America. The group increased in number only by 2023 from 1880 to 1890, in sharp contrast to the population boom during the 1870s, from 63,199 in 1870 to 105,465 in 1880. The number of Chinese American kept dropping, from 107,488 in 1890 to 89,863 in 1900, to 71,531 in 1910 and to as low as 61,639 in 1920.⁹ At the same time, the acquisition of Hawaii in 1898, with full citizenship for all its residents, greatly increased the Japanese-American population, which surpassed the Chinese-American population to be the largest Asian-American group in the U.S.A. in 1910.

The Chinese Exclusion Act left Chinese no choice but to rely solely on blood connection to obtain admission to America and American citizenship since the governmental policy allowed offspring of American citizens to enter and live in the United States. After all birth records were destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, quite a number of young

⁷ Mark Kanazawa, "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation Gold Rush in California," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Economic History Association, 2005), 779-805.

⁸ Collected in Franklin Odo, ed., "An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese (a.k.a. Chinese Exclusion Act)," *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 62-63, originally published in *The Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, vol. XXII (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883).

⁹ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Asian for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States: 1870 to 1890," "Asian for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States: 1900 and 1910," "Asian for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States: 1920," U.S. Census Bureau, released on September 13, 2002. Retrieved on February 12, 2012 from <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>>

Chinese men turned to fake documents claiming them to be sons of American citizens to realize their American dream. After coming into the country, they remained in illegal status known as “paper sons” and lived only within the realm of “Chinese America” because the more distinguishable their Chinese characteristics were in the surroundings, the more likely they would be questioned for their identity and thus would expose their lie. Further, travelling to China might cause troubles when returning to America, which prevented many American-born Chinese from visiting the country of their origin, finding a spouse there and having children born with rights to be American citizens. In fact, some Chinese who were legal residents in America had to refer to the legal system to guard their rights of (re)entering the United States and enjoying citizenship. This fact helps to explain the shrinking Chinese-American population over the years from 1890 to 1920 and the slow increase in population before mid-1900s.

The most famous legal cases on Chinese’s right of entering America are the case of Wong Kim Ark in 1898 and the case of Chin Bow in 1927. Wong Kim Ark, born in San Francisco to resident aliens from China, had to petition for his reentry to the United States as a citizen after a trip to China in 1894. Based on the first clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, the Supreme Court granted his request.¹⁰ Chin Bow, a grandson of an American citizen and a son of an American citizen by birth who actually had never been in the United States, was also denied entry. The commissioner of immigration, used the law of property as the theoretical basis for his decision, believed Chin Bow’s father, born and living in China, could not pass on his American citizenship to Chin Bow. The

¹⁰ Collected in Odo, ed., “Supreme Court: United States v. Wong Kim Ark,” *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience*, 112-114, originally published in Stephen K. Williams, *Cases Argued and Decided in the Supreme Court of the United States*, Book 42 (Rochester, NY: The Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Co., 1926).

Supreme Court, however, denied this decision, ruling under the law of blood and permitting Chin Bow's admission.¹¹

The birth of Chinatown and the life in such "a city inside a city" were also results of the anti-Chinese policies and practices. In 1910, in response to the soaring increase of applications for admission to America with counterfeit materials after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the U.S. government set up an immigration station on Angel Island, a small island in San Francisco Bay. The inquisition of a single applicant could last for days, weeks or even years. It included questions such as "How many steps in your house (in China)?" "Your house had a clock?" and "Which position do you sleep?"¹² which in fact had little to do with discovering the fakers. During the intervals of inquisitions, the immigrants lived on the island without proper sanitation facilities, privacy, or freedom. The prolonged waiting, depressing living conditions and dehumanizing treatments were negative influences on the new immigrants' psyches. Chinese Americans in the early years were far more cautious than normal members in a society should be. Many immigrants led a guarded life because they were real criminals entering the country with fake citizen papers, and even those who went through the inquisition without cheating felt unsure of their legal rights because they were treated as criminals upon arrival. When facing prejudice from city residents, Chinese Americans chose to stay away. When being discriminated against in regulations, especially those concerning housing and property, they chose to obey. Chinese Americans' passive acceptance of their situations partly reflected the human nature that

¹¹ Collected in Odo, ed., "Supreme Court: Weedin v. Chin Bow," *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience*, 208-210, originally published in Williams, *Cases Argued and Decided in the Supreme Court of the United States*, Book 71 (1927).

¹² Diane Mei Lin Mark and Ginger Chih, *A Place Called Chinese America*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 1982), 48.

people tend to feel safer when with their group. It also showed traits of traditional Chinese values prevailing among the early immigrants that encourage people to avoid conflicts, even at the expense of justice and fairness. As a result, in the early twentieth century, Chinese Americans lived in segregation from mainstream American society, earning a living through small import-export businesses, labor-intensive manufacturing and service industries. The second-generation Chinese Americans, as will be shown in the next section, displayed less blind humbleness than their parents, and showed the active attitude and energy American values cherished.

The negative effects unfavorable policies had on the Chinese immigrants were passed on to their sons and daughters. Despite the efforts to gain the same civil and economic rights as whites, the younger generation of Chinese Americans seldom made their voice heard and having a word in the policy-making process seemed to be a mission impossible.

The claims they made, while showing their Americanized values and their awareness of being Americans, were more centered on the intention than the result of communication with American society. Started in 1895 as the Native Sons of the Golden State, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, which had its headquarters in San Francisco and branches in other cities, did more to encourage Chinese Americans to gain acceptance through active participation in social activities than to fundamentally persuade the American government to spread democracy to Chinatown. In the 1930s, Chinese-American workers' unions organized strikes to express their dissatisfaction about workers' devastating working conditions. Though working conditions for Chinese-American workers improved as a result of the strikes, they were still very harsh in comparison to the average working conditions for

American workers because Chinese-American workers' unions only intended to show the dissatisfaction rather than bringing any solid changes. Opposition to the 1860 legislation made by California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Andrew Moulder on exclusion of Africans, Chinese and Indians from the public schools ran into the 1930s and the segregation finally ended because of financial reasons, as the State was trying to cut down the cost on public education, rather than the challenges from Chinese Americans.¹³ It was not until World War II that most Chinese Americans could establish some effective, long-lasting and fairly equal exchanges of ideas with mainstream Americans. Before then, for most Americans, Chinese Americans were simply an abstract and maybe absurd notion, because they saw these yellow-skinned people were just Chinese but not Americans. As for Chinese Americans, many felt more needed by the Chinese people across the ocean and thus became more concerned with the political and social conditions in China. Even during the early stage of World War II, when mainstream Americans concentrated on the European warfare, Chinatown was overwhelmed by campaigns to relieve China from the Japanese assaults. The activities, though quite successful, were mostly limited to cities such as San Francisco and New York, where most Chinese Americans lived. They relied more on their own than on summoning the strength of all people in America in their efforts to support China. Their influence was confined within the gates of Chinatown because of the hostile attitude American society held towards them, which was expressed explicitly in the early policies and court trials.

As shown in these policies, trials and their consequences, prewar interactions between

¹³ *Ibid*, 92.

Chinese Americans and mainstream America were quite unbalanced. While American government was active in forming a distorted public opinion of people with Chinese ancestry, Chinese Americans mostly accepted the treatment with little resistance. The prewar interaction revealed how little mainstream Americans understood and cared about Chinese Americans, and how many restraints, from the outside world and from within, Chinese Americans had to overcome in order to express themselves.

Different Groups of Chinese Americans in the 1930s

As an Asian group in a society dominated by European descendants, the Chinese-American community, in common understanding, was composed of identical individuals of oriental appearance, behaviors and beliefs. In fact, this was not always the case. Over the years, the composition of the Chinese American population changed and each subgroup developed distinct characteristics. According to Kevin Scott Wong, Chinese Americans can be roughly grouped under three categories. Those on the Hawaiian Islands, where Asians and Pacific Islanders made up the majority of the population, were the most comfortable with a multiracial neighborhood and were the most Americanized. The American-born mainlanders identified themselves as Americans while feeling an emotional link to China, and the new immigrants felt the least connected to their adoptive country but were the most eager to appeal to mainstream Americans.¹⁴ The differences among different groups of Chinese Americans were crucial when it comes to military organization and the service people's war experiences.

The Chinese Hawaiians formed a relatively independent subgroup, partly because of

¹⁴ Kevin Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 125-161.

their physical distance from the rest of Chinese Americans and partly because of the racial composition of the islands' population. Japanese descendants, who occupied the largest part of the local population, were excluded from service until late in the war, as the military was concerned about their loyalty. It is estimated that around 3,400 Hawaiians of Chinese descent were part of the 40,000 Hawaiian military personnel.¹⁵ Most of the Chinese Hawaiians were first inducted to form the Hawaiian 298th and 299th Infantry Regiments, with mostly Filipino soldiers and racial-conscious white officers from the southern mainland. When the local forces were disbanded, many were transferred to integrated units. This, however, does not mean that World War II had less impact on Chinese Hawaiians' understanding of their fellow Chinese and Chinese Americans. Though most of the service people from Hawaii served in Europe, some did go to the China-Burma-India Theater and encountered Chinese people. In either racially integrated units or exclusive Chinese-American units, the Hawaiians may not have had direct interactions with other Chinese descendants, but they did explore a world outside the islands when they travelled to big cities, such as New York City and San Francisco, or to the southern states where racial relations were sensitive. Their increased awareness of racial background and social status helped to forge their Chinese-American identity.

The relationship between immigrants from China and American-born Chinese was subtler and more complicate. In the late 1930s, while the American government tried to keep the country away from the war and society focused its attention on European warfare, Chinese Americans, especially those in large Chinatowns, actively involved themselves in

¹⁵ Gwenfread Allen, *Hawaii's War Years, 1941-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1950), 264-265.

China's resistance against Japanese invasion. It is remarkable because this group of people, who were passionate about the prosperity of China, had presumably stronger personal connections to America than to China. 1940, the year before America's official involvement in World War II, marked a new page in history as the year in which the number of American-born Chinese in the U.S. unprecedentedly surpassed that of immigrant Chinese.¹⁶ Understandably, the former group was of younger age, and a generation gap, in addition to cultural differences, could have existed between the two groups. The Chinese-American youth were fond of American social life such as parties, sports and fashionable dressing and cars. Valuing typical American virtues such as independence, aggressiveness and progressive thinking, they argued in favor of marriages based on love.¹⁷ Growing up in America, the second-generation Chinese Americans were very curious about China, a place they had never been to but often heard about from their parents. Like many westerners, they formed romantic illusions about China and Chinese people and were excited to learn about their origin through personal experiences.

The elders, on the other hand, lived in a way more traditional in Chinese culture and believed more in conservative Chinese values, which made them more focused on their own businesses than on the happenings outside Chinatown. The immigrant Chinese, who had experiences of what life was like in China, were less interested in China or the population in general. They were more concerned with their family members and relatives in China, which partly urged them to take the chance to go back as American soldiers. Also, as residents without citizenship, they would find that fighting for America could enhance their

¹⁶ L. Ling-Chi Wang, "Politics of Assimilation and Repression: History of the Chinese in the United States, 1940 to 1970," unpublished manuscript, Asian American Studies Collection, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California at Berkeley, 288.

¹⁷ Mark and Chih, *A Place Called Chinese America*, 85-86.

identification with their adoptive country and the country's recognition of them. There were "paper sons" who entered the country illegally and chose to serve in the armed forces in fear of deportation. Some Chinese immigrants were offered naturalization while in service. Though a few of those who raised a family in America turned the opportunity down in consideration of the possible deportation of their relatives, many took advantage of this policy. In retrospect, people who did not choose to become American citizens while they were in the military eventually earned their citizenship in one way or another. For their own good and that of their children, the Chinese staying in America without a proper identification fought in the military, and during the process, they gained not only their citizenship but their "blood" connection to America.

When it comes to military organization, the American-born generally preferred integrated units, though many of them ended up in specialized Chinese-American sections. They would apply for technical or combatant positions in the army, which were more popular at that time, though "it seems that the army always saw Chinese as cooking candidates."¹⁸ About 25 percent of all Chinese-American soldiers serving in World War II were assigned to the Air Service Corps, which was then a part of the army, but many of them ended in all-Chinese-American units with roles supportive to the combat.¹⁹ The immigrants from China, partly because of their unsatisfactory English fluency, were organized into separate groups. Many were assigned to the navy, and those in the army were mostly in charge of noncombatant missions and were sent to the China-Burma-India Theater. This

¹⁸ Marray K. Lee, "The Story of Jim Yow O. Hom," in Alex Stewart ed. and Priscila Echeverria ed., *Through the Eyes of Heroes: A Tribute to San Diego's Chinese American Veterans* (San Diego, California: The San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, 2010), 2.

¹⁹ William Strobridge, "Chinese in the Armed Forces," in Thomas Chinn, *Bridging the Pacific, San Francisco's Chinatown and its People* (San Francisco, California: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1989), 147-150.

might be because the first-generation Chinese Americans, many of whom were with no legal status in America, were less likely to argue for the more popular positions. It might also be because the cross-Pacific voyage from China to America in their early years helped to demonstrate their qualifications as navy sailors, the first military position open to Chinese Americans. Although many Chinese-American service people developed lifelong camaraderie within the separate units, many others, “especially those who were officers, often said they regretted having [served in separate Chinese-American units].”²⁰

The distinct characteristics of the three subgroups in the Chinese-American community—Chinese Hawaiians, immigrant Chinese in mainland, and American-born Chinese in mainland—reveal Chinese-American service people’s multi-layered intentions for fighting the war in the name of the United States. They provide an explanation of the diverse but essentially similar wartime experiences among Chinese Americans, tying them together by imposing a double meaning on their war efforts. They show that World War II is not only an opportunity for Chinese Americans to know more about America and China, but also to better understand themselves as a compound entity.

In such a condition prior to the war, Chinese Americans stepped out of Chinatowns to fight Nazism, to voice their standpoint, and to find out who they were.

²⁰ Wong, *Americans First*, 178.

Chapter Two: Chinese Americans and People of Chinese Ancestry

World War II, as many Chinese Americans have claimed, was “the most important historical event of [Chinese Americans’] times”²¹. It was because the varied degrees of Americanization among subgroups of Chinese Americans were further demonstrated during the war, whereas the personal experiences in China with Chinese people convinced those Chinese-American soldiers serving in China-Burma-India Theater of their ineradicable American qualities. When war came to America, of the 29,000 Chinese Hawaiians and the 78,000 mainlanders of Chinese ancestry, over 13,000 fought on behalf of the United States.²² Another source says that the number of Chinese-American servicemen and women could have been between 15,000 and 20,000, representing 20 percent of the Chinese population in America at that time, whereas only 8.6 percent of the general population joined the military.²³ The percentage of Chinese New Yorkers being drafted was close to 40 percent, the highest rate of all minority groups in the city.²⁴ Of more than 13,000,000 enlisted men in the army, 0.2 percent were Chinese Americans, amounting to 0.019% of the total population in America in 1942.²⁵ Because of their ethnic background, Chinese Americans were less likely to be accepted as volunteers, which may lead to the overrepresentation of Chinese Americans in the army in this figure of enlisted men. The patriotism of Chinese Americans, however, should not be underestimated. Chinese Americans of different regions and ages

²¹ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Viking, 2003), 215.

²² “Chinese-Americans in World War II,” U.S. Army Center of Military History, retrieved on September 28, 2011 from <<http://www.history.army.mil/html/topics/apam/chinese-americans.html>>

²³ Him Mark Lai, “Roles Played by Chinese in America During China’s Resistance to Japanese Aggression and During World War II,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives, 1997* (Bristance, California: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1997), 99.

²⁴ Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love* (Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1996), 50.

²⁵ Mapheus Smith, “Populational Characteristics of American Servicemen in World War II,” *The Scientific Monthly* (Washington D.C.: James McKeen Cattell, 1947), 246-247. “Historical U.S. Population Growth by year 1900-1998,” *Current Population Reports, Series P-25, Nos. 311,917,1095* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, released on June 4, 1999).

came together to receive training and to fight for peace. This chapter aims to reveal the short and long-term consequences of such interactions Chinese-American military personnel had within their group and with native Chinese during World War II.

Interactions Among Chinese Americans in the Military

While Chinese Hawaiians were mostly serving in units with no or few Chinese Americans from outside the islands, as discussed in the previous chapter, the two subgroups in mainland America had more extensive interactions between them, especially when they were serving in separate Chinese-American units. The most noticeable all-Chinese-American unit during the war is the 407th Air Service Squadron of the 14th Air Service Group. *Gung Ho*, the newspaper of this squadron once published an article in order to settle a dispute about who were the majority in the population of its enlisted men. The statistics collected through a survey tell much about the composition of the squadron, the Chinese Americans in service, and the general Chinese population in mainland America. The article also hints at the relationship between the American-born Chinese and immigrant Chinese in the army.

237 enlisted men were in the 407th Air Service Squadron. Californians, numbering 110, made up the biggest percentage of the men in the squadron, followed by 43 New Yorkers.²⁶ The rest came from 24 other states. San Francisco contributed 23 percent of the overall personnel, being the biggest source among all cities. Slightly more immigrants from China were in the squadron than those born in America, respectively representing 57 percent and 43 percent of all men.²⁷ The discrepancy in this ratio and the fact that there were more

²⁶ Christina M. Lim, Sheldon H. Lim & the veterans of the 407th Air Service Squadron, *In the Shadow of the Tiger, the 407th Air Service Squadron, Fourteenth Air Service Group, Fourteenth Air Force, World War II* (San Francisco, California: privately published, 1993), 212-218.

²⁷ William J. Hoy ed., *Gung Ho*, no.4 (January 14,1944). Collected in Lim, Lim and the veterans of the 407th Air Service Squadron, *In the Shadow of the Tiger*.

American-born Chinese in the country was because there were more females than males in the American-born generation and, understandably, more males than females were accepted by the military. The fact that American-born Chinese were more likely to be assigned to integrated units might also contribute to this phenomenon, since the 407th Air Service Squadron was a Chinese-American unit. As for age, the oldest enlisted men were in their fifties, but the majority ranged from late teens to mid-thirties. A few of the men were married but most were bachelors. This partially resulted from the legacy of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which left a great portion of Chinese population in America being male, single, and without dependents.²⁸ While some soldiers in the 407th Air Service Squadron, like So Tak who had served ten years in the Chinese Nationalist Air Force and had arrived in America six days before his enlistment, spoke almost no English, some knew little Chinese. There were people fluent in both languages, most of whom were American born but raised by parents speaking Chinese, and they served as the communicational bridge between the Chinese-speaking group and the English-speaking group. The example of So Tak, who was listed as a member from New York, NY ²⁹, is also important because it shows that once in America, the new arrivals regarded themselves as a member of their adoptive country, emphasizing their American identity over their Chinese way of living. About a quarter of the soldiers had college education. Many had attended Poy Jing Middle School in Canton either because they were born and raised in China or because they went back to China in their teens to receive more traditional Chinese education. The subjects covered chemistry, mechanical engineering, architecture, and economics. Many had work or training

²⁸ Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 228.

²⁹ Lim, Lim and the veterans of the 407th Air Service Squadron, "The Men who Served in the 407th Air Service Squadron, as Compiled by the Army Air Corps.," Appendix A to *In the Shadow of the Tiger*.

experiences in fields of electronics, auto mechanics, carpentry, and other traditional Chinatown enterprises, such as Laundromats and restaurants.³⁰

All the demographic information mentioned above is quite representative of the general conditions of Chinese-American military personnel in World War II. An interview with Peter Lew, who was assigned to a Fort-Ord-based, integrated unit in 1944, also gives a typical example of the composition of Chinese-American military personnel that the enlisted men in the 407th Air Service Squadron represented. Lew was eighteen and had just graduated from high school when he joined the army. He spoke English and what people in his neighborhood called “Juk Sing Language,” which is a mixture of Chinese dialects, but he couldn’t read or write Chinese and were thus referred to as ABCD, American-born Chinese Dummy. He worked at Warehouse Number Two on the Oakland Army Base while in school and took classes on aircraft engine maintenance because “all we know is that when we got out of high school, we would get drafted” and “everyone had the hopes of going to the Air Corps, because the Air Corps was part of the army.” Peter Lew also remarked that quite a few of his relatives and friends accepted positions in all-Chinese-American units with “the intention that they would be sent to China.”³¹

As demonstrated above in the cases of the 407th Air Service Squadron and Peter Lew, Chinese-American military personnel, including the 1300 to 1400 Chinese-American soldiers in the 14th Air Service Group, displayed a diverse cross section in terms of age, geography, education, pre-war occupation, and cultural background. Those differences were specially noteworthy and influential when it came to interactions among Chinese-American service

³⁰ *Ibid*, 16-17.

³¹ Robin Li, “Peter Lew: Oakland Army Base Oral History Project” (Berkeley, California: Regional Oral History Office, 2008), 8, 11, 15.

people from different regions. Peter Phan paid special attention to the varying degrees of language proficiency in this service group, arguing that it “serves as a basis for intragroup differentiation among the Chinese Americans.”³² The different language abilities and the cultural heterogeneity exposed in the choice of language created tensions between American-born-Chinese soldiers and immigrant-Chinese soldiers. More important, they illustrated the awkward position Chinese Americans had within the larger society, because even when Chinese Americans, especially those who were born in America and spoke English instead of Chinese, had much in common with mainstream Americans and viewed themselves as Americans, they were nonetheless perceived as foreign. In being Americans, Chinese-American soldiers also displayed noticeable regional characteristics. While Chinese Hawaiians were fascinated by the sensitivity mainlanders had with racial issues, immigrant Chinese found many American practices new to them and some Chinese practices Americanized. Even within the American-born Chinese subgroup, New Yorkers took pride in their metropolitan ethos, the Californians valued their casual and easy-going practices, and people from the Midwest, where religious Caucasians made up the majority of population, believed that, though they had a less strong sense of community than Chinatown residents in big cities, they “faced very limited discrimination [because of] the Bible Belt [in the countryside]”³³. Their shared Chinese heritage seemed to be less important in this situation because there was no outsider to highlight such common points. Such American-ness, however, was obscured by Chinese Americans’ special preference of language or social

³² Peter Phan, “Familiar Strangers: The Fourteenth Air Service Group Case Study of Chinese American Identity During World War II,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (San Francisco, California: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1993): 82.

³³ Wayne Hung Wong and Benson Tong, *American Paper Son: A Chinese Immigrant in the Midwest*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 48.

practices. Though not as explicitly segregated as Black Americans in the South, Chinese Americans were considered to be their own group outside the center of American society.

The language barrier, however, was lowered, as Chinese-American soldiers had made efforts to create a bilingual environment. *Gung Ho* was designed to include both English and Chinese articles. A special column of Chinese lessons sometimes showed up in the Chinese section, and daily events, including both Chinese and western festivals, would be announced in the "Chop Suey" part. Formal and informal language schools were organized. In Hawaii, the Chinese Language Training Center had teachers flown from China to teach Chinese. The students would spend eight to nine hours every night studying Chinese language, history and geography. The training could last months and many of the students would be assigned Intelligence missions in the China Theater.³⁴ For soldiers who served in China, cartoon guidebooks, pocket books of emergency expressions, and records of Cantonese and Mandarin were provided by the United States War Department. These publications were designed to enlighten the soldiers and arouse their interest in the difficult language. The special emphasis on listening and speaking also reflected the practical purpose of teaching and learning Chinese at that time. Such training on Chinese language during the war not only greatly increased the efficiency and accuracy of American operations in China, as telephone reports of Japanese movements no longer needed to be translated³⁵, but it was also important for the survival of Chinese customs in America, because the younger generation, which was prone to adopt English language and American mainstream culture³⁶,

³⁴ Kevin Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 158.

³⁵ Jack Belden, "Chennault Fights to Hold the China Front: His new Army Air Force takes offensive against Japs," *Life*, August 10, 1942.

³⁶ Him Mark Lai, "Retention of the Chinese Heritage, Part II: Chinese Schools in America, World War II to the Present,"

had to study Chinese language and culture in the military. At the same time, some Chinese Americans were giving English lessons to illiterate soldiers, including white and Chinese Americans, across the country. For those who were learning, the mastery of the English language enabled them to better participate in training, obey orders and communicate with fellow soldiers; for those who were teaching, the superstition that whites were superior was dismissed and the resultant higher self-esteem enabled them to go out and cooperate more actively with others. Languages and the insufficiency of language fluency turned out to be an opportunity for different groups of Chinese Americans to socialize and thus know more about each other. They also helped Chinese-American soldiers involved in such activities to reflect more thoroughly on Chinese and American cultures as well as their Chinese and American qualities, which was fundamental in the establishment of a new Chinese-American identity.

Food preference is another important link among Chinese-American military personnel. The preference for Chinese food erased the differences between Chinese Americans from different regions and, in many cases, imperceptibly tied them together. Going out of Chinatowns, Chinese Americans highlighted their ethnic identity by searching out and grouping together in Chinese restaurants. They took pride in that “no matter where I’ve been in this world, I’ve always managed to find Chinese food.”³⁷ Though their primary purpose of going to Chinese restaurants was for food, Chinese-American soldiers met and came to know each other as a result of these food hunts. Jennings Hom, who served in the Pacific Theater as a member of the 14th Air Service Group, recalled, “When we got off the

Chinese America: History and Perspectives 2001 (San Francisco, California: Chinese Historical Society of America, 2001), 10.

³⁷ Won-loy Chan, *Burma: The Untold Story* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1986), 15. Cited in Phan, “Familiar Strangers,” 94.

ship in Bombay, all the Chinese restaurants in town were swamped because everyone missed Chinese food. Everyone had to wait a long time for the food to come out... When the food came out, everyone started fighting for the food..."³⁸ The benefits Chinese cuisine had brought to Chinese-American service people also led to a firmer acceptance of the Chinese characteristics in their identity, despite that the war dispelled the image of a romantic China they had long held in mind. Eddie Fung, though being the sole Chinese American in his group, used to exchange food with local Chinese merchants while he was in Bandung and cooked animal organs in a typical Chinese way to help him and his peers to survive the food shortage in the Japanese camp of war prisoners.³⁹ Apparently, food would have been his connection to other Chinese Americans, if there had been any other Chinese American.

While it was Chinese food that united Chinese Americans together, Chinese-American service people's taste was Americanized. Serving in China and having great access to real Chinese food, many soldiers in the 407th Air Service Squadron craved beefsteak and butter made from cow's milk more than any other food. They finally satisfied their hunger with ice cream, fresh meat and white bread in Shanghai, a highly westernized city in China in the 1940s. The Americanized choice of food separated Chinese-American service people from the local Chinese, especially those in war-devastated areas, who fed themselves with things that middle-class Americans would never put into their mouths. The alien food exacerbated the soldiers' homesickness about America, as many mentioned later that they missed "mom's home cooking,"⁴⁰ which further demonstrated their link to America, the mother

³⁸ Quoted in Marjorie Lee, ed., *Duty & Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California* (Los Angeles, California: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1998), 73.

³⁹ Judy Yung, *The Adventures of Eddie Fung: Chinatown Kid, Texas Cowboy, Prisoner of War* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ Alex Stewart ed. and Priscila Echeverria ed., "Their Stories: In Heroes' Words," *Through the Eyes of Heroes: A Tribute to*

land. The dual nature of Chinese-American military personnel's food preferences distinguished them from other American soldiers as well as the local Chinese. In their search for delicacies and in discussions of food, Chinese-American servicemen and women developed familiarity and friendship among them.

The army life, however, was not all harmonious. Even within the Chinese-American circle, there were disagreements and conflicts, such as the dispute in the 407th Air Service Squadron about where most of the enlisted men in the unit came from. The very existence of disagreements, however, served as the evidence that despite of their all being Chinese Americans, diversity still existed. Tech Sergeant Kim W. Jung in the 407th Air Service Squadron described his army life as "an experience to meet many other Chinese Americans from all over the USA and learn what their world was like."⁴¹ Take Chinese Hawaiians as an example. Used to be protected by the unique racial system on the islands, where different races fulfilled different social roles in an integrated society but none was necessarily treated in a discriminatory way, Chinese-Hawaiian soldiers coming to mainland to receive military training learned about the separated life mainland Chinese Americans led and the discrimination against African Americans in the South. As a result, they became a part of the endeavor during and following the war to encourage Chinese Americans' integration into the mainstream and to promote racial equality. Indeed, for most Chinese Americans, serving in the military in World War II was the first time, and for many also the only time, that they left Chinatown, travelling around the country and the world, experiencing other cultures, and meeting people. In the interviews of 409 World War II veterans from southern California,

San Diego's Chinese American Veterans (San Diego, California: San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, 2010), 110.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 131.

experiences outside the neighborhood they grew up in, including the interaction with other Chinese Americans, is referred to as the most influential change World War II brought to them, besides the new education and job opportunities provided by the G.I. Bill.⁴²

Interactions with Chinese in China

For Chinese-American military personnel who had the opportunity to go to China, the interactions with “real” Chinese were quite influential on their self-identification. They had faces that resembled the local Chinese’s, uniforms that were of American style and behaviors that were somewhere in-between. The encounter between Chinese-American military personnel and Chinese in China revealed some stereotypes about Chinese traditions, culture and society held not only by Caucasian Americans but also by American-born Chinese. But war-devastated China was far from the romantic image second-generation Chinese Americans and even immigrant Chinese who had left China decades ago had in mind. The difficult reality led Chinese Americans to further realization of their Americanized way of life and, more or less, urged them to extend that way of life to their family when they had the chance.

Before the soldiers departed for China, a handbook produced by the United States Army Forces was distributed to introduce China to American troops heading for the China-Burma-India Theater. The handbook included two parts: the first on how American soldiers should behave in China and the second on how the Chinese came to view the world in certain ways. What is described in it as Chinese’s opinions on American soldiers is one the few sources available today that tell the attitude of the other side toward the interaction

⁴² Lee ed., *Duty & Honor*, 71-78, 90-218; Stewart ed. & Echeverria ed., *Through the Eyes of Heroes*, 101-150.

between Chinese-American military personnel and the native Chinese. "The Chinese figure that, after all, because of the years they have absorbed Jap punishment and drained Jap strength, [American soldiers] have reason to be grateful to them."⁴³ The description had some truth and could be applied to explain some of the Chinese's behaviors towards Chinese-American soldiers. For a very long time, because of the humble status of Chinese abroad, they were regarded as orphans by those remaining in China. When World War II brought American armed forces to China, Chinese people were undoubtedly awed by the advanced technology the westerners possessed, though they still believed in their advantage in spirit. A Chinese American, in their eyes, was a Chinese who failed to fulfill his responsibility to his country, China, after the Japanese invasion in 1937. Ordinary Chinese had suffered greatly and had lost everything to the war, while corrupted officials were used to taking advantage of turbulent situations to exploit people—they expected Chinese-American soldiers to make up for their failure to render service to China by compensating them, individual Chinese, with material or monetary goods. Inevitably, such thoughts made Chinese-American military personnel regard some local Chinese as people with "ulterior motives of wanting [Chinese-American soldiers] to sponsor them back to the U.S.A."⁴⁴ and thus keep a distance from the locals. Eddie Fung, who could have pretended to be a Chinese and hid in the local Chinese merchant's home when his unit was ordered to surrender, chose to stay with his comrades because he was not fluent in Chinese and, more importantly, he was unsure whether the local Chinese were "people I could trust and relate

⁴³ United States Army Forces China-Burma-India, "Here's How: A Handbook for American Troops in China," retrieved on February 25, 2012 from < <http://cbi-theater-6.home.comcast.net/~cbi-theater-6/hereshow/hereshow.html>>.

⁴⁴ Lim, Lim and the veterans of the 407th Air Service Squadron, *In the Shadow of the Tiger*, 51.

to.”⁴⁵ Chinese-American soldiers enjoyed better relationship with Chinese children than with the adults, though the children still sought to gain from their relationship with the soldiers. They, unlike the suspicious adults, welcomed the U.S. Army more warmly and often hung around the camps in hopes of getting some leftovers from the soldiers’ meals. The most famous of them was Ta Bin Chin, or Stevie as he was later called. An orphan from the Kweilin area, Stevie travelled with the troop ship *Alderamin* and worked in exchange for food. Smuggled on board by C. Louie Jew, a member of the 14th Air Service Headquarter Squadron, Stevie made his way to America. After years of interrogation and waiting, he was finally adopted by Jew’s mother and became a U.S. citizen.⁴⁶

The corrupted KuoMinTang government and its soldiers were also a big reason why Chinese Americans turned away from being “Chinese.” Despite all the money raised in Rice Bowl Parties in Chinatowns in the earlier stage of the war, Chinese-American service people were astounded to find how poorly Chinese soldiers, including many in the governmental forces, were equipped. They lacked the basic supplies—for instance, they were marching in straw sandals—let alone the advanced armament. Most of the raised fund, as some Chinese Americans believed, was embezzled by the officials. At the same time, poor peasants and their few belongings were forcibly confiscated by the undisciplined KuoMinTang soldiers. John Chuck, an American-born Chinese in the U.S. Army was once threaten by a Nationalist guard with “rifle and bayonet” for money, because he was mistaken for a Chinese.⁴⁷ The brutality of the Chinese authorities went against the American virtue of freedom in which the Chinese-American service people believed. More likely to fall victim to the Chinese

⁴⁵ Yung, *The Adventures of Eddie Fung*, 97.

⁴⁶ Lim, Lim and the veterans of the 407th Air Service Squadron, *In the Shadow of the Tiger*, 68-69.

⁴⁷ Phan, “Familiar Strangers,” 90; Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 231.

system than Caucasian Americans, Chinese-American service people were more aware of the danger posed by the Chinese government and were more prone to seek protection from the U.S. Army. It does not mean that no friendships developed between Chinese-American and Chinese soldiers, but the dirty reality about the KuoMinTang government turned the previous glorified imagination of China into disappointment.

While they all displayed American-ness, the diverse origins and the varied degrees of Americanization Chinese-American military personnel had were also highlighted in their expectations of life in China and their different reactions to the lack of certain necessities of life in China. The handbook written by the U.S. Army Forces for American soldiers serving in China illustrated the romantic vision many American-born-Chinese soldiers had. It took pains to introduce Chinese culture, entertainment in particular, including "Tea Shops," "Eating," "Drinking," "Festivals and Anniversaries," "Theater" and "Athletics." Many of the activities described were, in fact, not available in war-torn China when the American army arrived. Instead, rural areas were scattered with bombed cottages and barren fields. In most of the cities, people were also running for their lives rather than enjoying entertainment like in the old days. While the American-born Chinese were shocked by the impoverished and backward situation in China after years of war, "those from China or those who had been in China at a younger age and had seen it before were not surprised by it."⁴⁸ William Lum, a Chinese Hawaiian transferred to China in 1945 on his own request, found China to be primitive, "just like the old West!"⁴⁹ When asked about their impression about China, Chinese-American service people talked about the transportation and the sanitary facilities

⁴⁸ Phan, "Familiar Strangers," 91.

⁴⁹ Wong, *Americans First*, 157.

the most. Cars, which were quite common in America, were not as popular as bullock-carts in China. Flush toilet, a must-have in American households, was nowhere to be seen in China, and people seemed to be satisfied with “squat” toilets or even pits in the ground.⁵⁰ This phenomenon, reflecting the disparate ideologies in the West and in China, shows that different pre-war experiences resulted in different feelings towards the conditions in China. Both reactions, however, reinforced Chinese-American military personnel’s identification as Americans. Those new to the low living standards found it hard to become accustomed to life in China, and those who knew about the situations would yearn more for the easy and comfortable American life they had just tasted.

Another important interaction Chinese-American military personnel had with native Chinese took place when World War II was drawing to an end, as many Chinese-American soldiers who had served in China went back to hometowns and visited families before returning to America and being discharged. Those who were married before going to America reunited with their wives, and those who were single and could not find a life partner in America took the chance to date and marry Chinese girls. Because of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, more males than females ventured to immigrate with fake birth certificates and finally settled in America. Consequently, in the 1930s, there were “five [Chinese-American] boys to every one [Chinese-American] girl,” and there were very few mothers or older female relatives immigrated to America from China. According to Chinese traditions, a boy “had to have a mother or another older female relative go with [him] to

⁵⁰ Phan, “Familiar Strangers,” 89-93; Christina M. Lim and Sheldon H. Lim, “In the Shadow of the Tiger: The 407th Air Service Squadron, Fourteenth Air Force, CBI, World War II,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1993): 57-58.

meet [the girl's] family" in order to ask for the permission to marry.⁵¹ Chinatown boys, who prone to marry girls with Chinese background, not only had few choices when it came to marriage but also had no older female relatives to help him arrange the engagement when a potential life partner showed up. Little detail was provided by either Chinese-American soldiers or the Chinese girls they dated and married, but one thing is quite clear: though the couples met in a traditional Chinese way, that is, in a meeting arranged by their parents, they had a say in the final decision. This particular interaction between Chinese Americans and Chinese in China proved that the young Chinese Americans were aware of their Chinese background and the difficulties they had to face in American society. Though there must have been conflicts between the two cultures in these families, the traditional Chinese values emphasizing filial piety and having a son to carry on the family name prevailed, and so did the joy of getting together with the family after so many years of separation. Chinese Americans' link to China was somehow strengthened through the servicemen's marriages.

In general, both Chinese-American service people and the local Chinese population were curious and suspicious about each other, but they actually showed each other friendship and respect. Though Chinese-American soldiers believed that they understood and respected the Chinese and their culture better than their Caucasian counterparts, they often felt isolated from the local population by their G.I. uniform. Their varied degrees of Americanization also resulted in their varied reactions to the conditions in China. While becoming physically closer to the Chinese, Chinese-American soldiers serving in China were

⁵¹ Interview of Richard Y. Wong. Cited in Victoria Moy, "Chinese American WWII Vets Remember Flying Tigers Days," *Huffington Post New York: the Internet Newspaper*, October 3, 2011, retrieved on February 25, 2012 from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/victoria-moy/chinese-american-wwii-vets_b_989073.html>.

constantly reminded of their being Americans.

In every way, interactions with Chinese Americans from different states and native Chinese in China made Chinese Americans in service during World War II less doubtful about their American identity. Their shared Chinese characteristics, which were conspicuous in American society dominated by whites, brought them together. Under the new circumstance where oriental looks were common, their distinctive American characteristics attracted attention. From then on, Chinese Americans, which included three subgroups with varied degrees of Americanization, recognized themselves as "immigrant Americans with Chinese heritage" rather than "Chinese living in America." Instead of simply lingering on the Chinese characteristics which constantly reminded them that they were different from people outside Chinatown, Chinese-American servicemen and women, who met, communicated and fought shoulder by shoulder with people of Chinese ancestry from different areas of America and China, learned about their traits as Californians, New Yorkers, Hawaiians and, most of all, Americans.

Chapter Three: Chinese Americans with Americans of Other Ancestries

During World War II, Chinese-American military personnel, who used to be confined to subservient positions, started fighting for America as pilots, medics, radiomen, officers and more. They served in nearly all branches of the U.S. military⁵², and many were in integrated units and had many more experiences with Americans of other ancestries than ever before. In interviews for memoirs of Chinese-American veterans, quite a few remembered their military career as a period for learning and growing. Indeed, while not all of them had the opportunity to communicate with Chinese Americans from other regions or native Chinese, all of them interacted with Americans of other ancestries, including Caucasians, who were usually in charge of the troop units or the training bases. Merging into the more American America, Chinatown boys and girls became more aware that their Chinese characteristics, while differentiating them from the white majority, determined their particular way of being Americans. Chinese Americans' presence in the military was a new experience to many white Americans as well. As a result, Chinese Americans' experiences in the military reflected the changing opinions the American government and its people had of Chinese Americans, and the interactions encouraged the formation of a new Chinese-American identity that characterized the community in the post-war era. The war Chinese Americans and their comrade-in-arms fought to win developed their mutual understanding, leading to the changing social atmosphere concerning first Chinese in general and then the Chinese in America.

⁵² One survey of Southern California Veterans of Chinese decent shows that "42% [of Chinese-American veterans were] serving in the Army, 39% in the Air Corps [which used to be a part of the Army], and the remaining 19% wore either the Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marines uniform." Cited in Jim Fong & Marjorie Lee, "The Unsung 290," in Lee, ed., *Duty & Honor*, 81.

Policies and Media Coverage Reflecting and Affecting Wartime Interaction

Few primary sources directly address mainstream Americans' attitudes towards the Chinese-American community, but some governmental policies and mass cultural products during the war do reflect the social elites' views that were influential on the public opinion. The Roosevelt Administration issued a number of regulations during World War II for the purpose of uniting the country, or at least the main body of white Americans. Together with the media, these policies reached this aim by fulfilling three supportive objectives, which include dismissing American people's concern that there would be enemies in disguise among them, countering the Japanese propaganda claims that Americans were an evil imperialist white race oppressing all Asians, and generating as strong a military power as possible. At the same time, written under the particular wartime conditions, the policies and related media coverage did reveal mainstream Americans' understanding of Chinese Americans and made their contribution to initiating Chinese Americans' integration into American society.

To a significant degree, the rise of social status and the new opportunities of interactions with American society Chinese Americans enjoyed during World War II were gained at the price of Japanese Americans' misfortune, both of which resulted from Americans' war-impacted views of the minorities. Because Japan was the country that had launched the first direct attack on America, catching the American people by surprise and causing severe losses, the American public suspected the disloyalty to America among citizens and residents with Japanese ancestry. In order to reassure the solidarity of the people, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, authorizing

the state governments and the military to intern Japanese Americans on the west coast as they saw necessary. The actual transportation and internment of Japanese Americans started soon after. In an army instruction for removal of Japanese Americans in Los Angeles, nailed to telephone poles to catch attention, the specific boundary of the city of Los Angeles to be evacuated was described. Within the described area, "all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated" and they were required to make arrangements of "most kinds of property, such as real estate, business and professional equipment, household goods, boats, automobiles and livestock" before their departure as "the size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group."⁵³ Los Angeles Chinatown, in which a considerable Japanese and Chinese population lived, was inside the described area. Understandably, the enactment of this army instruction and Executive Order 9066 in a broader area left the positions previously occupied by Japanese Americans vacant and the enterprises previously run by Japanese Americans unattended. Meanwhile, the frenzied war efforts had diverted males to the military and females to the factories and shipyards, leaving few people available for the openings. Alternate manpower was badly needed, and minorities like Chinese Americans eventually became desired. Chinese youngsters were also enrolled in the U.S. military because they had to fill the positions when soldiers of Japanese origin were removed from the battalions or grouped together to form separate units. Intensified interactions between Chinese Americans and white Americans thus became possible.

⁵³ Collected in Franklin Odo, ed., "Army Instructions for Removal of Japanese Americans in Los Angeles, May 3, 1942," *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 269-271, originally published in Presidio of San Francisco, "Instructions to all Persons of Japanese Ancestry," (San Francisco: U.S. Army, May 3, 1942).

The wax-and-wane relationship between Japanese and Chinese Americans also revealed itself in the mass media. Composing the largest two groups of Asian minorities in America, people of Japanese and Chinese origins shared many characteristics in appearance and culture. When the war came to America, such similarities, and the differences deliberately drawn between the two groups for the purpose of propaganda, were heatedly discussed. Magazines, newspapers and even military pamphlets issued features on the Japanese-Chinese distinctions. An article entitled "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese" appeared in *Life* magazine, the most popular and influential photo news magazine in the country⁵⁴, on December 22, 1941. A similar article was published in *Time* on the same day.⁵⁵ The effectiveness of the "rule-of-thumb"⁵⁶ to tell Chinese from Japanese introduced in such articles was questionable, but they did reveal the long-term stereotypes of Chinese and Japanese in American society and the fondness for the allied Chinese and the hatred towards the enemy Japanese during the war.

Published two weeks after the Pearl Harbor attack and the Niihau Incident—immediately following the Pearl Harbor attack, a civilian Japanese national and two Hawaiian-born ethnic Japanese on the island of Niihau violently freed a captured Japanese naval airman, raising serious concerns about the loyalty of ethnic Japanese to America—"How to Tell Japs from the Chinese" offered the title rules that were impossible to apply in daily encounters because they depended too heavily on the minute differences of the anthropological features between the two people. The accuracy of judgments could be

⁵⁴ The sales volume of *Life* reached 13,500,000 copies per issue at its peak.

⁵⁵ "How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs," *Time*, December 22, 1941.

⁵⁶ Collected in Odo ed., "Life Magazine, 'How to Tell Japs from the Chinese,' December 22, 1941," *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience*, 253-255, originally published in *Life*, December 22, 1941, 81-82.

worsened because it involved cross-racial identification. For example, Chinese were described as having higher nose bridges than Japanese, but compared to Caucasians, they both have flat noses. Moreover, this article focused more on the northern Chinese than the southern, when most Chinese in America at that time came from the southern and coastal regions such as Canton and Shanghai. Beside all these, little time was allotted to test the rules, because within three weeks of the printing, the above-mentioned, infamous internment of Japanese Americans was launched in California, which, in addition to being a political decision, was more or less a product of public opinion expressed through articles and reports like "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese." This publication, however, did accomplish something by divulging Americans' changing views of the two peoples in its way of writing, which apparently favored Chinese over Japanese. For instance, the choice of examples, "Chinese public servant" in comparison with "Japanese warrior", shed light on the belief that while the Chinese were more gentle in nature and prone to peaceful activities, the Japanese were all aggressive and horrible militarists. It was a fairly new interpretation of these Asian groups, which had been developing since the start of World War II.

As the war progressed, the media started to pay more attention to not just the appearance but also the personalities of Chinese people. In May 4, 1942, *Life* magazine ran a cover story on Chinese pilots being trained in Arizona. Continuing to shed a positive light on this Asian group, the article portrayed young Chinese men as "more attentive in the classroom than any other nationality," "as fun-loving and mischievous as any American youths," and "so expert in volleyball and basketball that they have had a hard time getting

American teams to play with them.”⁵⁷ The portraits of Chiang Kai-shek, the Generalissimo and President of China during World War II, on the covers of *Time* also told the same story. The April 4, 1927 issue (see Figure 1), which was published over a decade before the war, used a pencil sketch of Chiang as the cover picture. In the sketch, Chiang displayed a stern looking, with his eyebrows knit in a frown and the corner of his mouth turned adown. The caption read, “...rose out of the Sun-set.”⁵⁸ On the cover of the June 1, 1942 issue (see Figure 2), Chiang smiled in a photo, with his head tilted upwards as if he saw hope.⁵⁹ The distant and unfamiliar Chinese before the war appeared to be amiable as an ally during the war; a country thought to be downward in the 1920s turned to appearing with hope in the 1940s; a people which used to be just subjects of anthropological studies was then human beings to be understood and appreciated.



Figure 1: “Chiang Kai-shek,” *Life*, Apr. 4, 1927



Figure 2: “Chiang Kai-shek,” *Life*, June 1, 1942

⁵⁷ “Chinese Pilots,” *Life*, May 4, 1942, 59-61.

⁵⁸ “U.S. Edition—April 4, 1927 Vol. IX No. 14,” *Time Magazine Online Archive*, retrieved on October 29, 2011 from <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601270404,00.html>>.

⁵⁹ “U.S. Edition—June 1, 1942 Vol. XXXIX No. 22,” *Time Magazine Online Archive*, retrieved on October 29, 2011 from <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601420601,00.html>>.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the internment of Japanese Americans and the articles featuring Chinese increased Chinese Americans' chance to communicate with the rest of Americans, the relationship between Chinese Americans and America did not change much. What Americans became increasingly interested in were Chinese people overseas. What they praised were Chinese people's characteristics. What they saw in Chinese Americans, however, was still exoticism. Chiang Kai-shek was portrayed on the covers of *Time* ten times from 1927 to 1955. Chinese soldiers, with or without Chinese children in the picture, were on the cover a couple of times and so were Chinese women in traditional Chinese costumes. No Chinese American made it to the magazine cover. When soldiers were hailed, white soldiers were presented; when women were praised, white women were presented; when American minorities were noted, African-American people were presented. Chinese Americans, who were no longer being discriminated against, were still regarded and treated as foreigners but not a part of the United States. The developing communications between Chinese Americans and America were, in a sense, more an international business than a national affair.

In addition to calming down its populace, American government had to demonstrate its reliability to Asian countries, which Japan was scheming to ally with by denouncing American ideology and political system. As a gesture to show the agreeable relationship between America and China, on December 17, 1943, Congress repealed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the subsequent laws, allowing a total of 105 Chinese to enter America each year. Though President Roosevelt denied that the act was issued to refute Japanese propaganda against capitalism in America, the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts could be

labeled as a pure political bargain because its promulgation was intended more for symbolic meanings than real effects on the Chinese immigration to America. The allocated quota for Chinese immigrants was based on the Immigration Act of 1924, which was issued at a time when Chinese immigration to America had been banned for over 40 years and the Chinese population in America was around the lowest point in history. In addition, only “up to 75 per centum of the quota shall be given to Chinese born and resident in China,”⁶⁰ which means no more than 79 native Chinese could come to America legally. Taking into consideration the demand for entry among Chinese, the number allowed was too insignificant to bring any real change. The biggest function of the repeal was to announce alliance between America and China to the world. Domestically, the repeal satisfied the American population’s urge for a closer relationship with China, which was a response to Madame Chiang Kai-shek’s appeal for Sino-American friendship after she had impressed the American public with her demeanor as a modern Chinese woman during her visit to America earlier that year.

If mainstream Americans only revealed their attitude towards Chinese Americans second-handedly through anti-Japanese policies and media coverage, the change in the policy of Chinese immigration presented their opinion more directly. The message was basically the same and still remained on the level of international politics, because the change could be understood as an acknowledgement of the appeals from the Chinese government, or a denial of Japanese propaganda claims, but hardly an intentional support to the development of the Chinese-American community. On the other hand, though

⁶⁰ Collected in Odo, ed., “Repeal of Chinese Exclusion Acts (Public Law 199), December 17, 1943,” *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience*, 281-282, originally published in *United States Statutes at Large Containing the Laws and Concurrent Resolutions Enacted During the First Session of the Seventy-eighth Congress of the United States, 1943*, vol. 57 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944).

unintentionally, the magazine articles did soften judgments mainstream Americans made about Chinese people, and the repeal did make a break in the chain of anti-Chinese legislation. For the first time in many decades, Chinese could legally enter the United States and become its citizens. The path was paved and would be widened in the future, as the allocated quota would be increased, the standard for eligibility would be lowered and, as soon proved, other Asian groups would eventually be able to enjoy similar rights.⁶¹

Finally, aiming to generate as strong a military power as possible, the U.S. government showed its trust in minority groups and, as a secondary effect, provided Chinese Americans with more opportunities to demonstrate their connection to America either to themselves or to their fellow Americans. Prior to World War II, very few Chinese Americans were serving in the military. Those who were enlisted were only eligible for serving as mess stewards or cabin boys, hoping that they would one day earn the status of officer's cook first class or officer's steward first class.⁶² It was after the Pearl Harbor attack that most Chinese-American World-War-II veterans started their service. Though no specific regulation on induction singled Chinese Americans out when it came to enlistment, more Chinese-American military people were actually drafted than enlisted. Ronald Takaki claimed that 13,499 Chinese Americans were in service during World War II, including both draftees and enlisted men,⁶³ and Shih-shan Henry Tsai listed the number of draftees at 12,041 without reference to enlisted men⁶⁴. According to the website of U.S. Army Center of

⁶¹ Asian Exclusion Repeal Acts approved in 1946 allowed Filipino and East Indian to be admitted to America on quotas. Mc Carran-Walter Act of 1952 extended the subjects of the immigration law to people from countries in the "Asia-Pacific triangle," which include Japanese and Koreans.

⁶² *Chinese Press (Hua Mei chou pao)*, May 20, 1942.

⁶³ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 73-74.

⁶⁴ Cited in Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 194-195.

Military History, "over 13,000 [persons of Chinese ancestry] were serving in all branches of the Army Ground Forces and Army Air Forces."⁶⁵ Based on the above-mentioned data, a rational conclusion would be that of over 13,000 Chinese Americans fighting for America, enlisted men were only in the thousands.

The passive participation in American military service does not necessarily mean Chinese Americans were unwilling to fight on behalf of America. For one thing, not so many young men and women were needed in the military before America officially entered the war. In this condition, the government was naturally more prone to rely on "real" Americans for the source of military personnel and the mainstream was still obsessed by the exoticism of Chinese Americans. The advantage of knowing Mandarin or Cantonese some Chinese Americans possessed was not as obvious in the early phase of World War II when the Pacific Theatre was yet to be opened as it later became. When massive mobilization started by the end of 1942, American-born Chinese passionately participated, identifying themselves with the rest of the country. The Chinese immigrants, on the other hand, were more hesitant because they were still trying to hide away from the authorities. It was because most of them, aware of the pathetic conditions in China after so many years of war, were eager to stay in America. When drafted, immigrant Chinese went partly to save their homeland from the Japanese talon, partly to serve the country by which they wanted to be accepted, and partly to avoid further questioning about the certifications of their identity. These men were drawn to the military also because of the policy that service people were eligible for naturalization. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that "paper sons" could gain legal

⁶⁵ "Chinese-Americans in World War II," *U.S. Army Center of Military History*, retrieved on March 12, 2011 from <<http://www.history.army.mil/html/topics/apam/chinese-americans.html>>.

status in America, as Chinese had been refused for American citizenship for the past half century. Given the opportunity to testify their bonds to America, the new immigrants from China forged their American identity and the American-born Chinese became more aware of the meaning of being Americans. Admitting Chinese Americans as a part of the honorable teams, the American government and society put the American-ness of Chinese Americans above their foreign background for the first time, which marked the beginning of a new era.

Chinese-American Soldiers Interacting with Soldiers of Other Ancestries

Chinese American military personnel's interaction with other American soldiers can be viewed from three ways. In a positive light, the army life was a rewarding and memorable experience. In a negative light, it was not spared from racial discrimination. In a neutral light, Chinese Americans did not demonstrated their capabilities to the fullest because of their ethnicity but did perform excellently in certain aspects to leave a renewed impression on the American population.

Most Chinese-American veterans referred to their interactions with Americans of other ancestries, most of whom were white, as experiences with minimal racial discrimination or conflict. "What I liked about being in the army was the strong sense of camaraderie—we learned to work together as a team," Edward Man Quong Fung described his six-year-long military experience in retrospect. "I don't remember any problems getting along with the guys or any instances of racial discrimination while I was in the army," though his Chinese ancestry made him noticeable at times, especially when it came to food preferences and talking through the phone with his mother who spoke only Cantonese. Fung attributed his harmonious relationship with other cadets to his tiny physique which "posed no physical

threat in any way” and his determination to avoid fights by ignoring the deliberate provocations. His life in Texas as one of the few people with an Asian background also provided him with valuable experiences regarding inter-racial communication.⁶⁶ Fung was not the only one who remembered his military life in a favorable light. Bill King, a Chinese American who flew with the Chinese Air Force for a couple of years and then joined the Chinese-American Composite Wing, agreed with him, “As far as I can remember, I can truthfully say that we got along well. Being an American Chinese and speaking the Chinese language, I was called [on] to interpret a lot.”⁶⁷ William Chan, employed by the U.S. Naval Air Station in California before the war and serving in Oahu, Hawaii as a recruiter, emphasized that he had great relationship with “a group of fine men.” Non-Asian members would invite him to leisure activities, his commanding officers never treated him differently because he was Chinese, and he learnt the most helpful lesson of opening himself up to new experiences and interacting with a diverse group, which “makes life more rewarding.” Robert Y. Fong, serving as an army medic, was also the only Chinese member in his unit, the 43rd Battalion. He also recalled no racial discrimination from his peers or commanders. In fact, his literacy in Mandarin Chinese and his access to medicine enabled him to communicate with the Japanese soldiers left behind and to help the sick local villagers when his battalion took over islands that had been liberated from the Japanese. It earned him respect and popularity from the American soldiers including his Jewish captain. Roy Kim Hong, who came to America when he was thirteen and learnt English from scratch, joined the Navy at

⁶⁶ Judy Yung, *The Adventures of Eddie Fung: Chinatown Kid, Texas Cowboy, Prisoner of War* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2007), 77-78.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Carl Molesworth and Steve Moseley, *Wing to Wing: Air Combat in China, 1943-1945* (New York, New York: Orion, 1990), 95.

nineteen. He never had problems with white sailors. Rather, many white officers, including a lieutenant, a chief bosun mate and a captain of a Liberty cargo ship, were so impressed by his talents that they sent him to engineering schools and promoted him to more important positions.⁶⁸ Helen Pon Onyett, who was one of the first Chinese-American women taking care of the wounded as a volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps, believed that she experienced no racial discrimination. Highly recognized for her service and finding her military experience very rewarding, Helen turned her military service into a lifelong career. She noticed that people would pay more attention to her female identity than to her Oriental one. Jessie Lee Yip, one of the few Chinese Americans in the Women's Army Corps, remembered no racial discrimination but remembered being courted by all Chinese-American servicemen on her base and making Chinese home cooking for them. In another case, the acceptance and good treatment she received as the only Chinese in her unit of Women's Air Corps helped Ruth Chan Jang live in peace with her Chinese ancestry despite the racial discrimination she had suffered in her hometown in Locke, California.⁶⁹

The list goes on and on. The unanimous praise of life as a service person could be explained in different ways. It could be that memory neutralized the cruelty of that period of time. It could be that Chinese Americans at that time were prone to tolerate and neglect minor slights due to the experiences they had in the past. It could be that they felt lucky enough in comparison to African-American soldiers who fared far worse. For those in segregated units or in China, it could be that the numerical advantage the Chinese

⁶⁸ Alex Stewart ed. and Priscilla Echeverria ed., "Their Stories: In Heroes' Words," *Through the Eyes of Heroes: A Tribute to San Diego's Chinese American Veterans* (San Diego, California: The San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, 2010), 102-150.

⁶⁹ Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995), 254, 256, 259-260.

population enjoyed in the group prohibited the white Americans from deliberate provocation. For those in integrated units, it could be that a single Chinese was no threat but just a noticeable person in the sea of Caucasians. It could be all these reasons combined. And, it could be a legitimate sign that the relationship between Chinese Americans and their fellow Americans was indeed changing. The unprecedented admission to not only the formal organization of the military but also mainstream Americans' circles of friends helped to improve the confidence and self-esteem of Chinese Americans, who would no longer blindly chase after the so-called American life but would live a life of their choice.

At the same time, there is still a dark side of the story when discrimination surfaced, either targeting at Chinese Americans or floating around them. The most obviously unfair treatment Chinese Americans had received was being turned down by selective military divisions for being Chinese. Robert Y. Fong, an electrician when the war broke out, was not accepted into the U.S. Signal Corps when he volunteered because he was not a citizen. Baldwin Hom failed to join the Army Air Corps for the same reason and so did Jim Yow O. Hom. Jessie Lee Yip, who was a U.S. citizen, was also rejected by the Women Accepted For Volunteer Emergency Service because of her ethnic background. All these people went to the frontline by postponing their enlistment or trying another more tolerant group. Once in the armed forces, a few Chinese-American servicemen or women recalled, white Americans would on occasion call them names or ask them malicious questions. Gorman Fong remembered being called "Ching chong Chinaman" and "slant-eye," and he had seen some other being called "Dirty" or "Ugly." Caucasian soldiers also made fun of Fong by asking if he was to be a cook or laundryman, which were occupations typically associated with Chinese

immigrants. When his group was stationed in Georgia, Fong, who was originally from Guangdong Province in China and spent four years in Fresno, California before being drafted, was astounded by the racial discrimination whites had against blacks. He was inevitably involved in the prolonged racial crisis because he had to choose a side, the white or the colored, when it came to using bathrooms or riding a bus.⁷⁰ Likewise, Henry Joe Kim, a Chinese Hawaiian growing up in an environment where relationship among races was cooperative and harmonious, found it difficult to adjust to the racial segregation in the South. The formation of the Chinese Young Women's Society in Oakland, California in 1944 also served as supportive evidence of certain degrees of racial discrimination against Chinese Americans in the army. The girls had to group together to welcome the returning Chinese boys because those boys would not receive service or companionship from whites in USO clubs due to their ethnicity.⁷¹

These moments of displeasure, though undesirable, were very likely to have resulted from immaturity and curiosity rather than hatred or any profound discrimination, and the results were not all bad. The slurs addressed to Chinese-American soldiers could be just a joking characterization, in the same way that New Yorkers would sometimes be called Yankees. The organization of the Chinese Young Women's Society also developed the social skills and leadership of Chinese-American youngsters, especially the girls. It taught them how mainstream American society functioned and prepared them for the new opportunities yet to come. All these experiences exposed Chinese Americans to the American culture and society more thoroughly, helping them to better locate their position in the nation and

⁷⁰ Stewart ed. and Echeverria ed., *Through the Eyes of Heroes*, 104.

⁷¹ Kevin Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 65, 57.

among their peers.

Instead of malicious discrimination, what more routinely happened in the military was that Chinese Americans were treated differently and were assigned different jobs from white Americans. In the Chinese-American Composite Wing, Chinese-American servicemen were often regarded as “Chinese” pilots with no mention of their American background. Compared to their American counterparts, Chinese technicians were found to be adequate at assembling machines but insufficiently trained for troubleshooting, because the instructors’ assignments to members of Chinese Air Force were not the same as those to American personnel. The two groups also dined and slept in separated areas and generally just spent duty hours together, which further hampered efficient communication between them.⁷² When serving in China, a squadron of the 14th Air Service Group noticed that every Chinese-American member in the squadron was paired up with a Caucasian soldier to do the city patrol. It was said that this arrangement was out of the consideration that Chinese soldiers were more calm and rational in face of dispute, though in fact they could be more irritated and unwise than their Caucasian partners would be. Though no rule was set against Chinese Americans, many, especially those with no expertise and knew little English, were still assigned to supportive, non-combatant positions. Many others, who were bilingual in English and Chinese or knew different Chinese dialects, were trained to be translators or intelligence service specialties. All these made Chinese Americans in the armed forces more aware of their distinct qualities from mainstream Americans’. They became more sophisticated in coping with racial discrimination that was still plaguing America and they

⁷² Quoted in Molesworth and Moseley, *Wing to Wing*, 13-14.

were more open to welcome friendship between different races.

As shown above, military life, which was an intensified version of civilian life because soldiers were bonded closer together, revealed several features of Chinese Americans' communication with mainstream Americans. Humble and willing to develop friendship with their comrades despite the occasional frictions, Chinese Americans were eager to be more involved in American society. They saw their admission to their new positions, including those in the military, as the country's recognition of their identity and their opportunity to prove themselves. In the meantime, both sides were aware of Chinese Americans' uniqueness in appearance and culture. While Americans of other ancestries showed tolerance and curiosity of Chinese practices, which sometimes led to special treatment to Chinese-American military personnel because of stereotypes, Chinese Americans were not ashamed of their differences and, more often than not, tried to prove the helpfulness of their culture. All these interactions, though still at its primitive stage, provided a promising future for Chinese Americans' integration into American society.

In a word, World War II witnessed a turning point in Chinese Americans' relationship to America and presaged further changes. Though policy changes were largely due to political pressure and the need of propaganda, the U.S. government and mass media were willing to pay more attention to Chinese and act favorably towards them. The oriental appearance, different language and certain traditional Chinese way of living distinguished Chinese Americans from the rest of military personnel, but the differences did not necessarily mean discrimination. While having to deal with some unfair treatments, Chinese-American soldiers enjoyed themselves during their service. They made friends, visited new places, and learnt

about America and its people. Most importantly, Chinese Americans discovered through the military life the similarities they shared with mainstream Americans, which reinforced their identification with the country. They came to value their uniqueness both as a vigorous counter-blow to racism and as a favorable response to the warming up of Uncle Sam's welcoming gesture. Their steps towards integration into the mainstream became firmer and steadier.

Epilogue: Chinese-American Veterans in Post-World-War-II America

Among all influences World War II exerted on Chinese Americans, the policies concerning veterans are the most substantial. Formally known as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, the G.I. Bill of Rights became law on June 22, 1944. Designed to be a stimulus package to integrate American veterans into society, it indeed helped Chinese Americans become more involved in mainstream life. Though signed before the success of the Civil Rights Movement, the G.I. Bill was race-neutral on paper, promising to benefit all veterans who had served the United States in the past 10 years. Chinese Americans who fought during World War II were eligible for this assistance program. Though still with great difficulties, they were able to have their own houses, a dream previously very hard to realize because of laws of property which were against Chinese. Between 1944 and 1952, 2.5 million returning veterans enjoyed low-interest mortgages through the provisions of the G.I. Bill, which amounted to 42% of World-War-II veterans.⁷³ Though only 0.1% to 2% of Federal Housing Authority or Veterans Affairs loans went to nonwhites, regardless of military status, the regulations regarding veterans' mortgages still opened a new way for Chinese Americans to buy their own houses.

Though the G.I. Bill provided benefits such as one year of unemployment compensation and low-interest home mortgages, what Chinese-American veterans thanked the most was the educational and employment benefits. According to Chapter 30 of the G.I. Bill, veterans could receive cash payments of tuition and living expenses to receive college, high-school, or

⁷³ Cyd McKenna, "The Homeownership Gap: How the Post-World War II G.I. Bill Shaped Modern Day Homeownership Patterns for Black and White Americans," Urban Studies and Planning—Master's Degree Thesis (Boston, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008). Retrieved on March 24, 2012 from <<http://dspace.mit.edu/bistream/handle/1721.1/44333/276173994.pdf?sequence=1>>

vocational education. Chinese Americans, who had to help run family businesses instead of receiving further education before World War II, had the chance to learn the advanced knowledge, which enabled them to be more competitive in the job market and to have more vocational choices. Calvin D. Lee, who was born in a family with a restaurant business in San Diego and had just finished high school before entering the service in 1943, attended college with funds provided by the G.I. Bill, his parents and his part-time work. He was then able to work for the Caltrans highway program, where he stayed for thirty-eight years. Kay C. Tong who served as a technician said, "Thanks to my service in the Army, the G.I. Bill gave me an opportunity to further my education which led to an outstanding career in engineering."⁷⁴ Jennings Hom received an education under the G.I. Bill at San Diego State College and gained a degree in Business Administration. What he learned from the college proved to be very helpful when he took over the family grocery store, moved it to a better location and expanded it. Thomas F. Hom, who originally came from China, worked for a plumbing shop after the war. When he was denied unionization when the shop unionized everyone else, he turned to the Veteran Affairs department and received help because he served in World War II. He then became the first Chinese American in the local Union.

Undeniably, there were still many Chinese-American veterans unable to enjoy the benefits of education and employment the G.I. Bill provided. Hing Jung Chan, for example, had to give up the opportunity to study at Los Angeles City College because he had to take care of his family's meat market. The working women also recreated the post-gold-rush tension, though this time the problem was not "too limited resources" but "too many

⁷⁴ Marjorie Lee, ed., *Duty & Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California*, (Los Angeles, California: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1998), 186.

available workers." Despite that, Chinese Americans were able to have more opportunities than they used to have, and going back to take care of their family businesses, to some Chinese Americans, was not an expedient measure but a choice, a choice of their own.

The gender ratio of the Chinese-American community was also affected by a government policy aiming at World-War-II veterans. War Brides Act was enacted on December 28, 1945. In addition to the 105 quota admission granted by the 1943 repeal of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, this legislation allowed foreign spouses and adopted children of American citizens serving in the army during World War II to enter the United States and be naturalized. While originally a boon to soldiers whose wives were from Europe, it left a more critical impact on Chinese Americans whose immigration had been under strict restriction since the late nineteenth century. The Chinese-American community, which had been dominated by bachelors for a very long time, had its sons travelling back to China to seek marriage. Many Chinese-American soldiers lengthened their service in China so they could have more time and opportunity to meet future spouses. Chinese-American servicemen, who became legal citizens of the United States for their contributions in the war, welcomed their wives and children. The preconditions regarding health that excluded "physically and mentally defective aliens"⁷⁵ from the subject of admission made sure that all those who did make it to America were strong and smart, securing a promising future of the Chinese-American group and America as a whole, since the loss of productivity due to veterans' handicap could be made up by the new comers. The Chinese-American community,

⁷⁵ Collected in Franklin Odo, ed., "War Brides Act (Public Law 271), December 28, 1945," *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 312-313, originally published in *United States Statutes at Large Containing the Laws and Concurrent Resolutions Enacted During the First Session of the Seventy-eighth Congress of the United States, 1943*, vol. 59 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946).

which was once severely stunted in continuity and development, then became balanced in gender and was filled with fresh blood. Within three years, War Brides Act enabled around 6,000 Chinese women to unite with their husbands in America.⁷⁶ The flourishing families not only dramatically added the Chinese-American population but enhanced the cultural influence of the group as well.

At the same time, sixteen veterans in Los Angeles area applied to the American Legion for a Charter in honor of Chinese-American veterans. Approved on September 21, 1945, Chinese Post, No. 628 was established to offer community service to its veterans and community at large. The services this Charter provided include readjustment assistance, legal counsel on immigration matters, and health care. It helped to enhance interracial communications and revived the pre-war friendship by organizing visits to wounded American soldiers of Japanese ancestry in local hospitals. The membership and the network survived the decade of transition in the 1950s because of the Charter leaders' hard work, which reflected on Chinese Americans' priority in the post-war era: rebuilding the family and the community.

After all, what Chinese Americans learned from their military career and the newly gained identity as veterans proved to be helpful in their readjustment to their community and the community's integration into society. These benefits made the Chinese-American group more settled in America and more identified with American society. These new opportunities, first limited to veterans, eventually reached out to ordinary Chinese-American citizens. They knew the outside world better, the world knew them better, and there was the

⁷⁶ Ping Linghu, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and their Lives* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 114.

possibility of breaking the confining cage. Thus, World War II, even after the signing of the armistice, continued to shape Chinese Americans and America.

Conclusion

In the course of World War II, Chinese Americans' life underwent a transition from being physically separated and culturally distinct from the rest of the society to being more familiar to and accepted by the mainstream. The same took place earlier in the military. Though the Chinese in America had started contributing to the country's prosperity since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Chinese Americans were living like outsiders in American society until World War II. The hostility the pre-war American society held towards Chinese Americans was obvious in the policies against Chinese immigrants. Upon the outbreak of the war in America, the tension was alleviated, but American public was still more attracted to the Chinese characteristics Chinese Americans shared with native Chinese, viewing Chinese Americans as foreigners. Even the military policies were not intended for Chinese-American veterans, though they greatly rewarded the community for its endurance and its children's sacrifices for the war efforts. The appearance of Chinese Americans in the military, however, did enable the society to find out and to know more about this group. Better understanding of Chinese Americans started among servicemen and women who had direct contacts with this group and gradually extended to the general public. Overall, the American society was in a trend of accepting Chinese Americans as a part of its existence, but quite reluctantly.

On the other hand, World War II urged Chinese Americans to participate more actively in American national events. Military personnel, who took the lead to go outside of Chinatown, were among the most important in this process. Their acquaintances with other Chinese Americans enabled them to have a more comprehensive understanding of America

and China, because their behaviors carried distinct traits resulting from the varied social environments in their hometowns. Their mission in mainland China enabled them to realize how helpful and potentially threatening their Chinese heritages could be, as they had a better chance to survive food shortage but might fall victim to Chinese people and soldiers who were desperate to gather material goods in the devastating war. At the same time, they became aware of the deep impact Americanization had on them. In general, their interactions with American soldiers of different origins dismissed their dread of communicating with mainstream Americans and prepared them for more social activities in the future. They understood their value as Chinese descendants because of their abilities to work as translators, intelligence workers and teachers, which were based on their language specialty. This more comprehensive understanding and the resultant acceptance of who they were further affected the whole community after the veterans returned home.

The formation of the Chinese-American identity was greatly affected by and largely based on Chinese-American military personnel's World-War-II experiences. For a long time, Chinese Americans were "Chinese living on the American land," speaking Chinese dialects and practicing Chinese traditions. In the years preceding World War II, Chinese Americans were "immigrant Americans living in a Chinese enclave," having limited opportunities of education, vocation and social activity. After the severe test of World War II and the close interactions with people of different origins, Chinese-American military personnel brought a new identity to the community. They were then "Americans with Chinese heritages." While they recognized their unshakable connection to the United States, Chinese Americans valued their Chinese characteristics. This new identity made Chinese Americans more confident in

themselves and more assured of their potentials, letting them stride into mainstream America with less hesitation.

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