

Visitors to San Francisco's historic Portsmouth Square on 7 May 1969 were startled to see the flag of the People's Republic of China flying over the plaza. The occasion had begun as a rally to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the May 4 movement in Peking, when Chinese students demonstrated to protest the ignominious treaties forced on a moribund Chinese Empire by Occidental imperialists. Now a half century later in San Francisco, a group of disaffected Chinatown youth took over the rally from its sponsors to protest against the community's poverty and neglect and to criticize its anachronistic and conservative power elite.

Calling themselves the Red Guards, the youths asserted their right to armed self-defense against the city police and called for the release of all Asians in city, state and federal prisons on the ground that they had had unfair trials. On a more immediate and practical level, the Red Guards announced plans for a remarkably unradical petition campaign to prevent the Chinese Playground from being converted into a garage and for a breakfast program to aid needy children in the Chinatown ghetto. If the platform of the Red Guards sounded vaguely familiar, a spokesman for the group made it plain: "The Black Panthers are the most revolutionary group in the country and we are patterned after them."

To most San Franciscans the rise of youthful rebellion in the Chinese quarter of the city must come as a surprise. For the past three decades Chinese-Americans have been stereotyped in the mass media as quiet, docile and filial, a people who are as unlikely to espouse radicalism as they are to permit delinquency among their juveniles. In the last few years, however, evidence has mounted to suggest a discrepancy between this somewhat saccharine imagery and reality. Not only is there an unmistakable increase in delinquent activity among Chinese young people, there is a growing restlessness among them as well. Chinatown's younger generation feels a gnawing frustration over hide-bound local institutions, the powerlessness of youth and their own bleak prospects for the future. The politics as well as the "crimes" of Chinatown are coming to resemble those of the larger society, with alienation, race consciousness and restive rebelliousness animating a new generation's social and organizational energies.

A basic cause for the emergence of youthful rebellion among the Chinese is the increase in the youthful population itself. There are simply more Chinese youth in the

ghetto now than there ever have been before, a fact that can be attributed to an increasing birth rate among the indigenous population and a sudden rise in immigration from Hong Kong and other Asian centers of Chinese settlement.

By 1890, eight years after a wave of sinophobia had prompted Congress to block any further immigration of Chinese to this country, there were approximately 102,620 residents here. The vast majority were laborers or small merchants lured here by the promise of the "Gold Mountain" in California and work on the railroads. But a more significant fact is that the vast majority were also men. Before the turn of the century there were about 27 men for every woman among the Chinese in America. What this meant for white perceptions of these newcomers is probably familiar enough. Forced into ghettos, their women and children left behind to care for and honor their parents, these men joined together in clan associations and secret societies to provide them with some sense of familiarity and solidarity; and they turned as well to the typical pleasures of lonely men—prostitutes, stupefaction (through opium) and gambling. Just as typically, in a society known for its hostile racial stereotypes, the Chinese came to be identified with these "vices" in the minds of many white Americans and to be regarded as bestial, immoral and dangerous. But the alarming imbalance in the sex ratio also meant that the Chinese communities in America were almost incapable of producing a second generation of American-born Chinese. It wasn't until 1950 that the American-born made up more than half the total Chinese population, and even this growth only came about through the small trickle of illegal entries made by Chinese women prior to 1943 and the much larger number who entered since that date, thanks to gradual but important relaxations of the immigration laws.

The most radical of these relaxations came with the Immigration Act of 1965 which repealed the entire system of quotas based on national origins and substituted an entry procedure based on skills and the reuniting of families. Under this law, according to District Immigration Director C. W. Fullilove, there will be approximately 1,200 Chinese entering San Francisco every year with the intention of staying there. Although not all of them will do so, this new influx of Chinese makes up a significant proportion of San Francisco's burgeoning Chinese population, and many of them fall between what Fullilove calls "the problem ages" for Chinese youth, 16 to 19.



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The Gold Mountain

Of course, sheer numbers alone do not account for the rise of rebelliousness among young Chinese in San Francisco. A more significant factor is that conditions of life in Chinatown are by no means pleasant, productive or promising. We must distinguish, however, from among the Chinese those who have escaped the ghetto, those who are American-born but who still inhabit Chinatown and the foreign-born youth who reluctantly find themselves

imprisoned within a ghetto even less of their own making than it is of the others'. Among those who have escaped there are, first, the scholars, scientists, intellectuals and professionals—many of whom hail from regions other than southeastern China, the original home of the bulk of America's Chinese immigrants—who have found work and residence within the larger society. Enclosed in university, corporation, professional or government communities, these Chinese do not for the most part feel themselves to be a

part of Chinatown; they go there only occasionally for a banquet or for a brief sense of their ethnic origins. A second group much larger than the first, although actually quite small in relation to the total number of Chinese, consists of those American-born Chinese who have successfully completed high school and college and gone on to enter the professions—most frequently pharmacy and engineering—the American middle class and, when they can evade or circumvent the still prevalent discrimination in housing, the finer neighborhoods or the suburbs. This “gold bourgeoisie”—to paraphrase E. Franklin Frazier—is also estranged from Chinatown. Proud of his own achievements, wary of any attempt to thrust him back into a confining ghetto existence and alternately angered, embarrassed or shamed by the presence of alienated, hostile and rebellious youth in Chinatown, the middle-class American Chinese holds tenaciously to his newly achieved material and social success.

Nevertheless, middle-class native-born Chinese are discovering that the American dream is not an unmixed blessing. The “Gold Mountain” of American bourgeois promise seems somehow less glittering now that its actual pinnacle has been reached. Chinese, like other descendants of immigrants in America, are discovering that the gold is alloyed more heavily than they had supposed with brass; but, like their second and third generation peers among the Jews and Japanese, they are not quite sure what to do about it. The price of success has been very great—not the least payments being the abandonment of language, culture and much of their ethnic identity. Among some there is a new search for cultural roots in Chinese history, a strong desire to recover the ancient arts and a renewed interest in speaking Chinese—at least at home. Others emphasize, perhaps with too much protestation, their happiness within the American middle class and carry on a conspicuous consumption of leisure to prove it. Finally, a few recognize their Chinatown roots and return there with a desire to aid somehow in the advancement of the Chinese ghetto-dwellers. Sometimes their offers of help are rejected with curses by the objects of their solicitude, but in any event the growing number of restive Chinatowners constitutes another challenge to the comfort of bourgeois Chinese.

In its most primordial sense the visible contrast between the style of life of the impoverished ghetto-dweller and that of the middle-class professional promotes guilt and shame. Somehow it seems wrong that one’s ethnic compatriots should suffer while one enjoys the benefits of success. Yet middle-class Chinese are quite ready to attribute their success to their own diligence, proverbial habits of thrift and hard work and to their conscious avoidance of delinquent or other kinds of unruly behavior. Naturally, then, some middle-class Chinese are equally quick to charge the angry Chinatown youth with indolence, impropriety and impiety. But even as they preach the old virtues as a sure cure for the young people’s personal and

social ailments, some perceive that there is more to these problems than can be solved by the careful nurturing of Confucian or Protestant ethics. They see more clearly than the Americanized and less alienated Chinese of the fifties that poverty, cultural deprivation and discrimination are truly obdurate barriers to the advancement of the ghetto-dwellers of today. Moreover, there is an even more profound problem. Like other alienated youthful minorities, the youth of Chinatown appear to reject just that dream which inspired and activated the now bourgeois Chinese. For the middle-class Chinese, then, the peak of the “Gold Mountain” seems to have been reached just when those still down below started to shout up that the arduous climb isn’t worth the effort.

Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels

Among Chinatown’s rebellious groups there are two distinguishable types of youth—those who are American-born but have dropped out of school and form part of the under- or unemployed proletariat of the Chinese community; and those recently arrived immigrant youth who, speaking little or no English and having little to offer in the way of salable skills, find themselves unable to enter the city’s occupational and social mainstream. Both native and foreign-born Chinese are included among the ranks of the quasi-criminal and quasi-political gangs that are accused of contributing to the mounting incidence of delinquency in the Chinese quarter. Culture, language and background have divided the native from the foreign-born Chinese in the past, and it is only recently that there is any sign of a common recognition between the two groups.

It is traditional to focus on Chinatown gangs as an unfortunate form of juvenile delinquency among a people otherwise noted for their social quiescence and honesty. A more fruitful approach however would adopt the perspective taken by E. J. Hobsbawm in his discussion of social bandits and primitive rebels. According to Hobsbawm, who has studied these phenomena in Europe, social banditry is a form of pre-ideological rebellion which arises among essentially agrarian, unskilled and unlettered peoples who are at great cultural distance from the official and oppressive power structure. It is led by those who enjoy a certain amount of local notoriety or awe. Often enough social banditry remains at a stage of petty criminality which is of concern, if at all, only to the local police. At a more refined stage, however, predatory gangs are formed which confine their criminal activities to attacks on strangers and officials and share any loot with local community members who, though not a party to the attacks, identify with and protect the robbers.

It is important to note that bandit gangs may adopt a populist or a conservative style. The former is symbolized by Robin Hood, who robbed the rich to feed the poor and attacked civic or state officialdom as intruders in the community’s traditional way of life. In the conservative style,

bandit gangs are co-opted as toughs and thugs to defend local satrapies and powerful petty interests. Social banditry may exist side by side with ideologically rebellious or revolutionary elements but is usually untouched by them except for particular reasons of strategy or tactics. Essentially, it is separated from ideological politics by its deep involvement with local ethnic rather than cosmopolitan class interests. However, it is not impossible for class and ethnic interests to merge and for the liberation of local groups to become enmeshed within the revolutionary aims of a radically politicized sector of a modern party state.

From the perspective of "primitive rebellion," Chinatown's gangs take on a greater significance for the understanding of loosely structured pluralistic societies like the United States. Gangs in Chinatown are by no means a new phenomenon, but their activities in the past describe mainly the early stages of social banditry. For the most part Chinatown's traditional social banditry has been of a particularly conservative type, identified with the recruitment of young toughs, thugs and bullies into the small criminal arm of Chinatown's secret societies. They formed the "flying squads" of mercenaries who "protected" brothels, guarded gambling establishments and enforced secret society monopolies over other vice institutions of Chinatown. From their numbers came assassins and strong-arm men who fought in the so-called tong wars that characterized Chinatown's internecine struggles of a half century ago and which still occasionally threaten to erupt today. But this form of social banditry was an exclusive and private affair of Chinatown. Insofar as Chinatown's violent altercations were circumscribed not only by the invisible wall around the ghetto but also by the limited interests of the contending parties for women, wealth and power, the community was isolated by its internal conflicts. Whether manifested in fearful acquiescence or active participation, the ghetto's residents were bound together in a deadly kind of "antagonistic cooperation."

Since 1943 a progressive cycle of rebellion among Chinatown's youth has metamorphosed from crime to politics, from individual acts of aggression to collective acts of rebellion and from nonideological modes of hostility to the beginnings of a movement of ideological proportions. From 1943 until 1949 juvenile crime in Chinatown was largely the activity of a small number of native-born boys about 15 years of age, hurt by unemployment, difficulties in home life or inadequate income. Their crimes were typical of the most individualized and inarticulate forms of primitive rebellion. Burglary, auto theft, robberies, larcenies, hold-ups and assault and battery constituted 103 of the 184 offenses for which Chinese male juveniles were referred to San Francisco's juvenile court in those years. There were also gangs of native-born youth, apparently sponsored by or under the protection of secret societies, who occasionally assaulted and robbed strangers in Chinatown, not a few of whom, incidentally, were Japanese-Americans recently

returned from wartime internment camps and also organized into clubs, cliques and gangs.

Petty criminal gangs emerged more frequently among both the native and foreign-born youth in Chinatown from 1958 to 1964. In some cases these gangs were composed of young men sponsored in their criminal activities by secret societies. An example was the "cat" burglary ring broken up by police in 1958 and discovered to be a branch of the Hop Sing Tong. Three years later, two gangs, the "Lums" and the "Rabble Rousers," were reported to be engaged in auto thefts, extortion, street fights and petty larcenies. In January 1964 members of a San Francisco Chinatown gang were charged with the \$10,000 burglary of a fish market in suburban Mountain View. A year later, the police broke up the "Bugs," a youthful criminal gang whose members dressed entirely in black, with bouffant hair style and raised-heel boots, and who, in committing 48 burglaries, made off with \$7,500 in cash and \$3,000 in merchandise in a period of six months. The "Bugs"—who capitalized on an otherwise stigmatizing aspect of their existence, their short stature—reemerged a year later despite an attempt by Chinatown's leaders to quell juvenile gangs by bringing in street workers from San Francisco's Youth for Service to channel the gang toward constructive activities. By the mid-1960s Chinatown's burglary gangs had begun to branch out and were working areas of the city outside the Chinese quarter.

The present stage of a more politicized rebellion may be dated from the emergence in May 1967 of Leway, Incorporated. In its history up to August 1969, the Leways experienced almost precisely the pattern of problems and response that typically give rise first to nonideological rebellion and then, under certain conditions, to the development of revolutionary ideology. Leway (standing for "legitimate way") began as a public-spirited self-help group among American-born Chinese teen-agers. Aged 17 to 22, these young men organized to unite Chinatown's youth, to combat juvenile delinquency and to improve conditions in the poverty-stricken Chinese ghetto through helping youths to help themselves. In its first months it gained the support of such Chinatown luminaries as Lim P. Lee, now San Francisco's postmaster and a former probation officer, and other prominent citizens. Through raffles, loans and gifts, these youths, many of whom could be classed as delinquents, raised \$2,000 to rent a pool hall near the Chinatown-Filipino border area. And, with the help of the Chinese YMCA and Youth for Service, they outfitted it with five pool tables, seven pinball machines, some chairs and a television set. "This is a hangout for hoods," said its president, Denny Lai, to reporter Ken Wong. "Most of us cats are misfits, outcasts with a rap sheet. What we're trying to do is to keep the hoods off the streets, give them something to do instead of raising hell."

Leway was a local indigenous group seeking to employ its own methods and style to solve its own members'

problems. And it was precisely this that caused its downfall. Police refused to believe in methods that eschewed official surveillance, sporadic shakedowns and the not always occasional beating of a youth "resisting arrest." Leway tried a dialogue with the police, but it broke down over the rights of the latter to enter, search and seize members at Leway's headquarters, a tiny piece of "territory" which the young Chinese had hoped to preserve from alien and hostile intrusion. Leway claimed it wanted only to be left alone by this official arm of a society which they saw as already hostile. "We are not trying to bother them [the police] . . . and we won't go out of our way to work with them either."

In addition to continuous harassment by white police, Leway failed to establish its legitimacy in Chinatown itself. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce refused it official recognition, and as a result Leway could not gain access to the local Economic Opportunity Council to obtain much-needed jobs for Chinatown youth. The Tsung Tsin Association, which owned the building where Leway had its headquarters, threatened to raise the rent or lease the premises to another renter. Finally, whether rightly or not, the members of Leway, together with other Chinatown youth groups, were blamed for the increasing violence in Chinatown. Throughout 1968-69 reports of violent assault on tourists and rival gangs were coming out of Chinatown. Police stepped up their intrusive surveillance and other heavy-handed tactics. Chinese youth charged them with brutality, but the police replied that they were only using proper procedures in the line of a now more hazardous duty. In late summer 1969 the combination of police harassment, rent hikes, Leway's failure to secure jobs for its chronically unemployed members and its general inability to establish itself as a legitimate way of getting Chinatown youth "straightened out" took its final toll. Leway House closed its doors. Dreams of establishing on-the-job training for the unskilled, new business ventures for the unemployed, a pleasant soda fountain for Leway adolescents and an education and recreation program for Chinatown teen-agers—all this was smashed. The bitterness stung deep in the hearts of Chinatown young people. "Leway stood for legitimate ways," a 15-year-old youth told reporter Bill Moore. "Helluva lot of good it did them." The closing of Leway destroyed many Chinatown young people's faith in the official culture and its public representatives.

The stage was set for the next phase in the development of rebellion. Out of the shambles of Leway came the Red Guards, composed of the so-called radical elements of the former organization. But now Leway's search for legitimacy has been turned on its head. The Red Guards flout the little red book *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* as their credo, make nonnegotiable demands on the power structure of Chinatown and the metropolis and openly espouse a program of disruption, rebellion and occasionally, it seems, revolution.



Leway had been modeled after other San Francisco youthful gang reform groups, but the Red Guards have adopted the organizational form, rhetorical style and political mood of the Black Panthers. A few years ago this would have seemed highly improbable. In the 1960s there were frequent bloody clashes between gangs of Chinese and Negroes, and interracial incidents at Samuel Gompers School—a kind of incarceration unit for black and Oriental incorrigibles—had not encouraged friendly relations among

the two groups. Nevertheless it was just these contacts, combined with a growing awareness of Panther tactics and successes, and some not too secret proselytization by Panther leaders among the disaffected Leway members, that brought the young Chinese to adopt the black militant style. Whatever prejudices Chinese might harbor against Negroes, Black Panther rhetoric seemed perfectly to describe their own situation. After all, Leway had tried to be good, to play the game according to the white man's rules, and all it had gotten for its pains were a heap of abuse and a few cracked skulls. Now it was time to be realistic—"to stop jiving" and "to tell it like it is." Police were "pigs"; white men were "honkies"; officially developed reform programs were attempts to "shine" on credulous Chinese youth; and the goal to be attained was not integration, not material success, but power. "We're an organization made up mainly of street people and we're tired of asking the government for reforms," said Alex Hing, a 23-year-old Chinese who is the minister of information of the Red Guards. "We're going to attain power, so we don't have to beg any more."

Urban Populism

The Red Guards are a populist group among Chinatown's "primitive" rebels. They stand against not one but two power structures in their opposition to oppression and poverty—that of old Chinatown and that of the larger metropolis. Ideologically they are located somewhere between the inarticulate rumblings of rustic rebels and the full-scale ideology of unregenerate revolutionaries. They cry out for vengeance against the vague but powerful complex of Chinese and white elites that oppress them. They dream of a world in which they will have sufficient power to curb their exploiters' excesses; meanwhile they do the best they can to right local wrongs and to ingratiate themselves with the mass of their Chinatown compatriots. The free breakfasts for indigent youngsters, a copy of the Panthers' program, attracts popular support among Chinatown's poor at the same time that it shames Chinatown's elites for allowing the community's children to go hungry. The demand for the release of all imprisoned Asians seems to place the Red Guards squarely on the side of all those "little people" of Chinatown who feel themselves victimized by an alien and oppressive police system. However, their ethnic consciousness usually supersedes and sometimes clashes with their alleged attachment to a class-oriented ideology, as it did when the Red Guards accepted an invitation to guard a meeting of the Chinese Garment Contractors' Association against a threatened assault by Teamsters seeking to organize Chinatown's heavily exploited dressmakers. But it is precisely their parochial dedication to a sense of Chinese ethnicity that endears them to the less hardy of young Chinatowners who secretly share their dilemmas and dreams, as well as limits their political effectiveness.

Populist rebellion is not the only form of social politics in Chinatown. A conservative type of rebelliousness is illustrated in the evolution of the Hwa Ching and the Junior Hwa Ching. Hwa Ching emerged in 1967 as a loose association of mostly Hong Kong-born youth in Chinatown. Estimates of its size vary from 25 to 300, and this fact alone testifies to its low degree of cohesiveness and the sense of drift that characterizes its members. Until very recently Hwa Ching was represented in most public discussions by a "spokesman" (its looseness of organization prevented any greater clarification of title), George Woo, a former photographer who took on the task of bridging the communication gap between the largely Chinese-speaking youths and the officials of the metropolis. The aims of this association are difficult to ascertain exactly, partly because there was little agreement among its members and partly because spokesman Woo usually tended to a violently polemical speaking style in order to call attention to the situation of Chinatown's immigrants. Hwa Ching had less of a perfected program than a set of practical problems. Hong Kong youth were insufficiently educated and skilled to obtain any jobs other than Chinatown's dreary positions of waiter, busboy and sweated laborer; unequipped linguistically to enter the metropolis and, in the beginning, unwilling to accept confinement in a congested, poverty-stricken and despotically ruled ghetto.

Hwa Ching seemed to form itself around El Piccolo, an espresso coffeehouse opened in Chinatown in 1967 and operated by Dick and Alice Barkley. Alice Barkley, herself a Hong Kong-born Chinese, turned the coffeehouse into a haven for foreign-born Chinese youth. There they could meet in peace and with freedom to discuss, argue, complain and occasionally plan some joint activity. Reaction to their clubby fraternization at El Piccolo was mixed. Traditional Chinatowners accused the Barkleys of offering asylum to raffish criminal elements; a newly aroused college and university group of Chinese-Americans praised the establishment of a place for impoverished immigrants to congregate; and most San Franciscans didn't even know the Hwa Ching existed.

Early in 1968 Hwa Ching approached the Human Relations Commission, the Economic Development Council and the Chinese business elite to ask for their aid in establishing an educational program for alleviating the misery of Chinatown's immigrant youth. Their approach was unusually frank and plainly practical. They proposed the establishment of a comprehensive two-year educational program to provide Chinatown's young immigrants with a high school diploma and vocational training in auto repair, business machine operation, construction, sheet metal, electrical installation and plumbing. They closed with a statement that was unfortunately taken as a warning and a threat. "We've been hearing too many promises. The rise and fall of our hopes is tragic and ominous."

This first bid for help was unsuccessful. In late February, however, the Hwa Ching tried again and spoke to the Chinatown Advisory Board of the Human Relations Commission. This time Hwa Ching, represented by the fiery George Woo, was more modest in its request for a comprehensive program, but more militant in its presentation. Hwa Ching wanted \$4,322 to build a clubhouse, but although Woo reiterated the same arguments as other Hwa Chings had presented in January, the tone was different. Describing his constituents, Woo said, "There is a hard core of delinquents in Chinatown who came from China. Their problems are the problems of all poor with the addition that they don't speak English." Then he added that "they're talking about getting guns and rioting. . . . I'm not threatening riots. The situation already exists, but if people in Chinatown don't feel threatened they won't do anything about it." The mention of guns and the warning of possible riots were too much for John Yehall Chin, a prominent Chinese businessman, principal of Saint Mary's Chinese Language School and member of the Human Relations Commission's Chinatown Advisory Board. In reply to the Hwa Ching's request he advised the commission, and indirectly the youths, "They have not shown that they are sorry or that they will change their ways. They have threatened the community. If you give in to this group, you are only going to have another hundred immigrants come in and have a whole new series of threats and demands." Although the commission expressed its interest, Hwa Ching's demand was rejected.

They tried again. In March the Hwa Ching's president, Stan Wong, presented the immigrant youths' case before the Chinese Six Companies, the oligarchy that controls Chinatown. Speaking in Cantonese, Wong repudiated the threat of riots made at the February meeting. "We made no threats," he said. "They were made by nonmembers. We need to help ourselves. We look to the future and are mindful of the immigrant youths who will be coming here later. We hope they do not have to go through what we've been through." Later he answered a question about possible Communist affiliation: "Hwa Ching is not involved with any political ideology." Although Commissioner Chin pointed out that the Hwa Ching had mended its ways, the Six Companies refused them help. Meanwhile the Human Relations Commission, under the direction of Chin, organized an Establishment-controlled Citizens for Youth in Chinatown. The Hwa Ching felt utterly rejected.

In their bitterness and anger, however, the Hwa Ching did not turn to populist revolt, as had the Leways. Instead they fragmented even more. Their loose coalition at El Piccolo ended when that establishment closed its doors in August 1968. The Hwa Ching had never in fact professed an ideology. What seemed to be one was more a product of the fervid imaginations of alarmed whites and of the fiery invective of George Woo than it was any coherent line of political or revolutionary thought. The Hwa Ching's

practical needs were too immediate, their literacy in English too low and their limited but practical political experience in Hong Kong and Chinatown too real for them to accept an organization that used Mao's red book and which therefore ran for them the risks of political persecution and possible deportation. As Tom Tom, a 23-year-old immigrant who had been one of the earliest members of Hwa Ching, explained to a reporter, the immigrant youth were independent of the Leway and all other Chinatown groups, affected none of the hippie-Ché-Raoul-Panther styles and wanted little more than jobs, girls and to be left alone. The Hwa Ching found themselves oppressed by their supposed allies nearly as much as by their condition. Leway boys and other American-born Chinese called them "Chinabugs" and attacked them in gang rumbles; Negroes picked on the diminutive Chinese until they learned to retaliate in numbers and with tactics; college students sought to tutor and to evangelize them with secular and sometimes political ideas but succeeded mostly in making them feel inferior and frightened by a kind of politics they abhorred.

By the middle of 1969 the Hwa Ching had split into three factions. One returned to the streets to fight, burglarize and assault all those available symbols and representatives of the seemingly monolithic power structure that had scorned them; two other factions apparently accepted co-optation into Chinatown's two most powerful though age-ridden secret societies—the Suey Sing and Hop Sing Tongs. There their anger could find outlet at the same time that their strength could be utilized for traditional aims. The secret societies could pay for the immigrant youths' basic needs and with the same expenditure buy the muscle to keep control of their own interests and institutions. And since the Tongs were part of the complex congeries of associations that make up Chinatown's power elite, it is not surprising that leaders of this same elite gave tacit approval to the Tongs' recruitment of what had appeared in early 1968 to be a serious threat to the old order. Unlike the Leway, which could not join the old order and may have been too Americanized to accept secret society patronage, the immigrant youth find in it a perhaps temporary expedient in their dilemma. Not being politicized, they can more readily join in the protection of old Chinatown. They have resumed a posture typical of earlier youthful generations' response to anger and poverty in Chinatown. They form the conservative wing of Chinatown's complex structure of conflict and rebellion.

In other areas and times of primitive rebellion, conservative and populist factions often fought each other as much as their professed enemies. Similarly, in Chinatown the young toughs who have become paid guards of the secret societies' and, occasionally, the Six Companies' meetings are not infrequently arrayed against the Leway-Red Guard gangs. And in this sense young Chinatown recapitulates a structure of conflict that characterized that of its earlier generations. Conservative-populist conflicts iso-



At the Chinese New Year parade, children march at left; while at right are representatives of the Chinese Six Companies whose leaders are shown here. They represent the pinnacle of the old order Establishment.

late the contending parties from outside groups and larger issues. The violent fights and smouldering feuds appear to noncomprehending outsiders to be exclusively Chinese in their nature and content. And this intramural conflict in turn circumscribes Chinatown and once again cuts it off from the metropolis.

Outside Ideologies

However, connections to the larger society of San Francisco in particular and the United States in general do exist. For the youth the most important one is the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA). This group was formed at San Francisco State College from among the more socially concerned and politically aware Chinese-American students. For a while it managed the special program by which Chinese students from the ghetto were recruited to the college. But the long Third World strike at San Francisco State College in 1968-69 radicalized its members and propelled them into even greater contact with the Chinatown community. They became actively oriented toward conditions about which they had been only vaguely aware before. ICSA asserted aloud and with emphasis what had been but an open secret for decades—Chinatown was a racial ghetto—poverty-stricken, disease-ridden, overcrowded, underdeveloped and with a population growing in Malthusian proportions. To the remedy of all these defects they dedicated themselves and established offices not only in the college but in Chinatown itself. ICSA provides tutoring services to Chinatown's less educated youth and urges that San Francisco State College establish even more programs for community rehabilitation. The community-oriented Chinese college youth do not openly attack Leway or the Red Guards but remain in communication with them as well as with the erstwhile Hwa Ching. But, observes George Woo, now as an ICSA member, "We can also see the pitfalls in using too much of the blarney, as the Red Guards did. As a result, they alienated immigrant youths and the whole community in three months' time." By keeping open contacts among the native- and the foreign-born, among Hwa Ching and

Leway-Red Guards, among status conscious diploma-bearers and socially stigmatized delinquents and among the legitimated and the lowly, ICSA may yet be able to blunt the deadly edge of conflict and build a durable community for Chinatown.

What this means specifically is by no means clear even to the ICSA members themselves. "I'm still trying to figure out what I am supposed to be as a Chinese-American," complained a 21-year-old college student, echoing the inner nagging question of most of his compatriots. And George Woo replied, "I know how you feel. I don't identify with China either and I certainly don't identify with the petty American middle-class values of my aunts and uncles." ICSA emphasizes a two-way learning process between the lettered and the dropouts and calls for the formulation of a new ethic to replace the Confucian-Protestant ethos of Chinese America. As ICSA leader Mason Wong has said, "Our generation here will no longer accept the old and still prevalent Confucian doctrine of success coming only from hard work and humility." What that ethic will be is not yet known. However, the Chinese must still contend with the traditional social order that is Chinatown's Establishment.

The Old Order

Anyone at all conversant with San Francisco's Chinatown will have heard of the Chinese Six Companies. In a vague sense he might know about some of its activities, be able to point out its headquarters and note that it is a benevolent, protective and representational body of Chinese who enjoy unofficial but influential standing at City Hall. Beyond this he might know very little but the familiar litany that the Chinese take care of themselves, contribute little, if at all, to the welfare rolls or to the city's alarming rate of juvenile delinquency and, that while the Chinese were perhaps at one time a troublesome minority, they are now safely ensconced in their own quarter of the city where they enjoy a modicum of freedom to practice peculiar cultural expressions derived from a China that is no more. To him the Six Companies is one aspect of that cultural freedom.

Like many stereotypes that arise in racist societies, this one too contains some kernels of truth. The Chinese in San Francisco, like the Chinese in Calcutta, Singapore, Bangkok, Saigon, Manila and indeed in almost every large city to which Chinese have migrated, enjoy a measure of home rule that far exceeds that of any other minority group in the metropolis. During the colonial period in Southeast Asia, the British and Dutch formalized their practices of indirect rule into a specified system of titles. "Kapitan China" was the Dutch designation for the uniformed and bemedalled Chinese who represented his people in the colonial councils at Batavia, and the "Captain China" system prevailed in British Malaya and other colonies as well. For the colonial powers indirect rule was an



expedient way of maintaining sufficient control over restless and hostile native peoples in a precariously pluralistic society in order to extract their labor and the colony's natural resources without having to contend with all their tribal and customary ways and woes. For the subject peoples it meant that they could freely organize their lives in accordance with traditional practices, so long as they didn't interfere with the rather limited interests of the imperial powers. Outside the colonial area, Chinese immigrant elites also managed to establish a kind of cultural extraterritoriality and to achieve an added legitimation to their traditional control over their fellow migrants by winning unofficial but practically useful recognition from white civic elites. In Vancouver, and in New York City the Chinese Benevolent Association has obtained such perogatives; in San Francisco it is the Chinese Six Companies.

But to understand Chinatown's power structure fully, it is necessary to analyze the several kinds of traditional associations from which it is composed. First there are clan associations, or "family associations" as Occidental journalists and sociologists usually term them. Clan associations derive from the lineage communities so prevalent in Kwangtung and ideally unite all persons descended from a common male ancestor. Overseas, however, the more manageable lineage unit was replaced by a kinship network

wider than that which originally enclosed only a compact village. The clan association includes all who bear the same surname. In the early days of Chinese immigration, the clan associations became a special kind of immigrant aid society providing the newcomer with food, shelter, employment, protection and advice. Furthermore, the clan leaders reminded the immigrant of his obligations to parents and family in the home village and, in the absence of the village elders, assumed a role in loco parentis, settling disputes, arbitrating disagreements and in general containing intraclan differences within the kinship fold. Some clan associations exercised a monopoly over a trade or profession in Chinatown and effectively resisted encroachments on these monopolies by ambitious Chinese upstarts from other clans. Until the recent arrival of large numbers of immigrants from Hong Kong, the clan associations had been declining in power and authority as a result of the aging of their members and the acculturation of the American-born Chinese. However, even this new lifeblood is less acquiescent than the former sojourner members. Chinatown clan associations are now challenged to provide something more than a paltry benevolence in exchange for their petty despotism.

In addition to clans, however, there developed among overseas Chinese a functionally similar but structurally



different type of association. The *hui kuan* united all those who spoke a common dialect, hailed from the same district in China or belonged to the same tribal or ethnic group. (It is a mistake to suppose, as many Occidentals do, that the peoples of China are culturally homogeneous. In the tiny area around Canton from which most of America's immigrants have come, there are numerous dialects which, while they have a common script, are almost mutually unintelligible when spoken.) In many ways the *hui kuan* were similar to those immigrant aid and benevolent societies established by Germans, Irish, Jews and other Europeans in America. In San Francisco and other cities in which Chinese dwelt, the *hui kuan*, like the clan association, maintained a headquarters and served as caravansary, hostelry, credit association and employment agency. In all these matters it exercised authoritarian control, and since most of the Chinese in America were debtors, directly or indirectly, to their *hui kuan*, its officers were not infrequently suspected of taking an excessive interest or a corrupt profit from their charges. The *hui kuan*, again similar to the clan, conducted arbitration and mediation hearings between disputing members, managed and collected the debts of its members and in addition charged them various fees for its services. An aging membership and the flight of the American-born bourgeoisie tended to undermine *hui kuan* authority, but the old businesses in Chinatown still affiliate with them and accept their mediation and arbitration services. They are especially important in the ownership and control of Chinatown property which they administer in a traditional way quite different from real estate management in the Occidental parts of the city.

The third major type of association in Chinatown is the secret society. Like the clan and the *hui kuan*, the secret society originated in China where for centuries it served as a principal agency for popular protest, violent rebellion

The old benevolent societies are losing power as their members escape the ghetto, or simply grow old.

and social banditry. The overseas migrants from Kwangtung included not a few members of the Triad Society, the most famous of China's clandestine associations. In nearly every significant overseas community of Chinese they established chapters of, or models based on that order. In the United States secret societies among the Chinese were set up by the early immigrants in the cities and also in those outlying areas where clans and *hui kuan* could not form a solid base. Inside Chinatown the secret societies soon took over control of gambling and prostitution, and it is with these activities rather than with their political or charitable activities that they are most often associated in the minds of non-Chinese in America. Clans, *hui kuan* and the several chapters of secret societies often fell out with one another over their competition for women, wealth and power inside Chinatown, and these so-called *tong wars* raged intermittently until a Chinatown Peace Association established a still perilous peace between the warring factions in the 1920s. The charitable works of secret societies were confined for the most part to giving mutual aid to their own members, the establishment of headquarters and hostelries and in recent years the building of clubhouses where their aged bachelor members might find hospitable fraternity. The political activities of the secret societies have consisted in their intermittent interest in the fortunes of China's several regimes, but they have not shown any particular interest in upsetting the national politics of the United States. Meanwhile the secret societies' most successful source of revenue in Chinatown—the control over gambling and prostitution—diminished as the Chinese bachelors aged and died and the American-born declined interest in these activities. The recruitment of the newly arrived and disaffected immigrant youth from Chinatown has undoubtedly done much to rejuvenate these societies, but it remains to be seen whether this will lengthen their life as institutions in America or change their function in accordance with new interests and current developments.

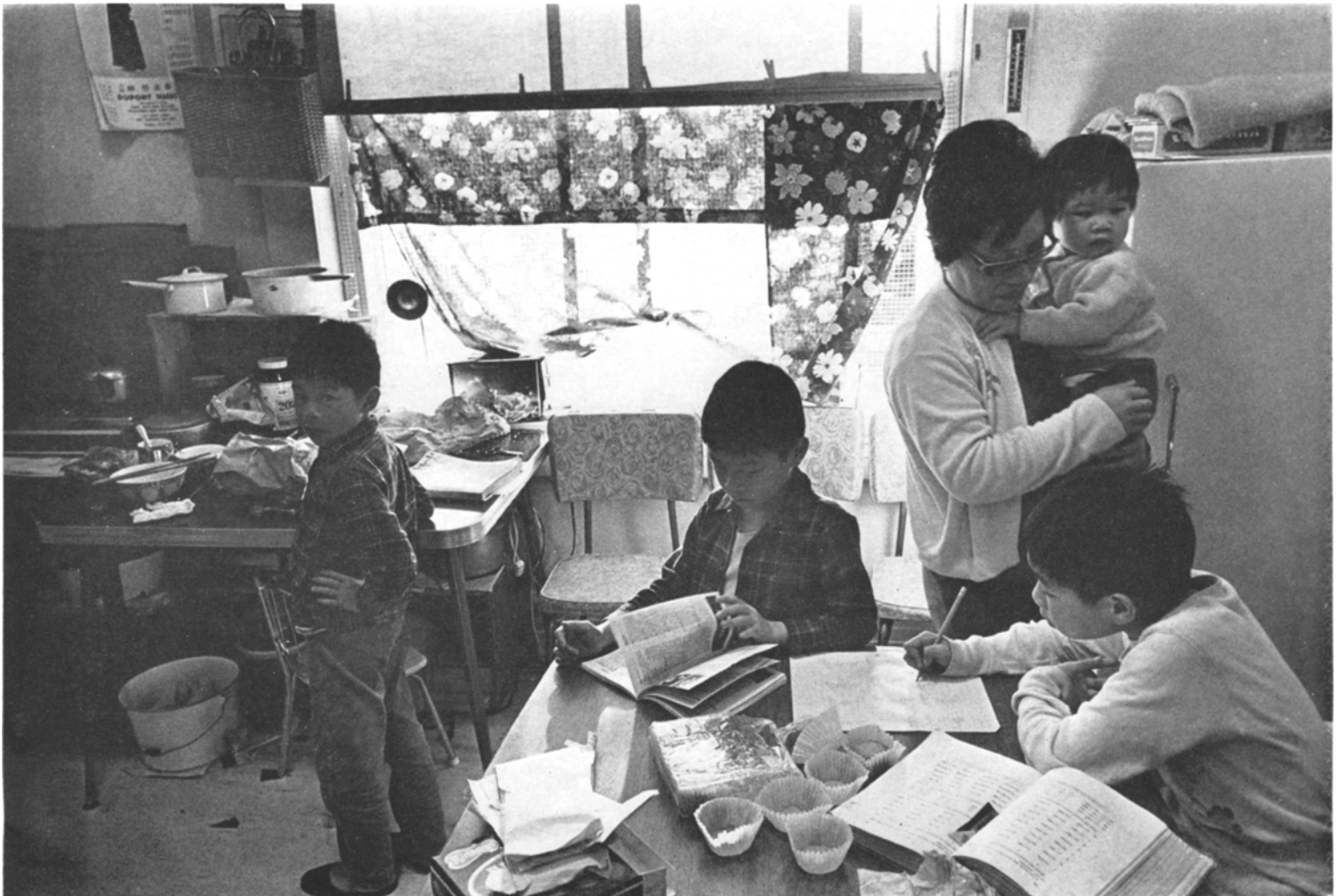
At the top of the community power structure of Chinatown is the Chinese Benevolent Association, commonly known as the Chinese Six Companies. It was formed in the late 1850s as a confederation of *hui kuan*—later it incorporated clans, guilds and, reluctantly, secret societies—in order to provide communitywide governance, to promote intracommunity harmony and to present at least the appearance of a common Chinese front to white society. Until the 1870s it functioned as an agency of international diplomacy and consular activity as well, since the Chinese Empire did not provide a specific overseas office for those duties. The Six Companies has been the principal spokesman for the Chinese to white America. It has protested against anti-Chinese legislation, helped fight discriminatory laws in the courts, petitioned federal, state and local governments in behalf of the Chinese and generally provided Chinatown with a modest respectability in the face of sinophobic stereotypy. One of its more recent

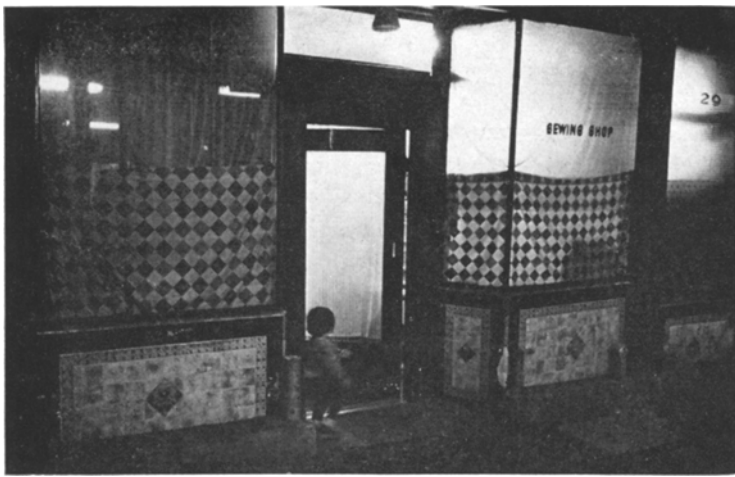
efforts in defense of Chinese in America was a protest against Secretary of Transportation John Volpe's omission of the role that Chinese played in the building of the Transcontinental Railroad when he spoke at the centenary celebration of its completion.

Gradually the Six Companies established its legitimacy as rightful representatives of the Chinese in San Francisco. Composed of merchants and traders, the leaders of the Six Companies seemed to inspire assurance among civic leaders that the Chinese were not a threat to the city's economic base. Moreover, the anti-Chinese movement in America was largely a movement of small farmers and laborers against what they described as the unfair competition of Chinese laborers. Once labor agitation had succeeded in driving the Chinese workers out of the city's industries and into the confines of Chinatown—a mission largely accomplished by 1910—civic functionaries were quite prepared to negotiate with the Six Companies whatever agreements might have to be reached between the ghetto and the metropolis. For its part the Six Companies, although it protested against the excesses of ghettoization, must have realized the gain to be made in its own power by having the great majority of Chinese housed and employed in Chinatown. The final establishment of Chinatown as an unofficial but

real quarter of the city consolidated and enhanced the power of the Six Companies over its denizens.

In effect the Six Companies' authority over Chinese in San Francisco was—until the advent of the American-born and the rise of intracommunity rebellion—an institutionalized version of the kind of control over Negroes in America exercised by Booker T. Washington and his "Tuskegee Machine" from 1890 until 1915. The slow growth of a second generation prevented an effective counteraction to its powers by an acculturated group demanding a new politics. To be sure, Chinatown's Six Companies had its W. E. B. DuBoises—men who opposed the despotic benevolence it exercised, the containment of Chinese in the ghetto that it tacitly espoused and the corruption in its offices. But they were too few in number to be effective, too readily co-opted into the controlled violence of Chinatown's secret societies or too easily frightened into silence by threats of financial loss, deportation or conviction of trumped-up crimes in the white man's courts, where Chinese interpreters could be bought and perjured witnesses were easily obtainable. When the American-born generation did reach maturity, many of its members went to college, entered the professions and departed from Chinatown. This caused the Six Companies some loss in its Chinese constituency,





but, since the Chinese-Americans *embourgeoisés* did not challenge the authority of the Six Companies, the loss did not undermine its control over Chinatown.

Legitimate and Illegitimate Rebellion

Today, in addition to the "illegitimate" rebellion of youth in Chinatown, there is a "legitimate" counteraction of adults against the communitywide authority of the Six Companies. This loyal opposition includes several intra-Chinatown associations composed of "respectable" members of the American-born and, occasionally, a foreign-born Chinese leader who opposes the associational oligarchy. Until 1956 the only significant organization among the American-born Chinese was the Chinese-American Citizens' Alliance, a group so small that in its early days, more than a half century ago, it was little more than a name promising assimilation. Since the mid-1950s, however, a new association has arisen—the Chinese-American Democratic Club (CADC). This organization of politically minded and socially conscious Chinese-Americans heralds a shift from communal-oriented traditionalism to civic-minded cosmopolitanism in Chinatown. Still another organization outside the domination of the Six Companies is the Concerned Chinese for Action and Change, a loose and informal association of middle-class Chinese-Americans who live outside the ghetto but who can be counted on to mass for support of more liberal social action in Chinatown. Third, the Chinatown-North Beach Area Youth Council, a product of the Economic Development Agency in Chinatown, seeks to link up the respectable middle-class Chinatowners with its less respectable youth groups. Finally, there is one aging Chinese, J. K. Choy, who almost alone has opposed the old order in Chinatown without effective reprisal. A Columbia-educated banker and a professed disciple of Fabianism, Choy has exposed the poverty and neglect hidden beneath the tinselled glitter of Chinatown's neon-lit ghetto. He organized a reading room and English classes for immigrants in the offices next to the branch bank which he oversees as general manager. When in October 1966 he advised the women employed in Chinatown's sweatshops to organize for better wages, shorter hours and improved conditions and offered a devastating criticism of the ghetto's

poverty program, rumors were started in the community which resulted in a three-day run on the bank. Unlike the old Chinese boycotts, which were used so effectively in the early days of the economically isolated Chinatown, this attempt to destroy a Chinatown reformer failed because the bank was protected by its connections to the larger banking system of the state. The failure to silence Choy by traditional methods is a measure of the ghetto's growing interdependence with the nation and a testimony to the decreasing power of traditional sanctions available to intra-community elites.

In Chinatown the arena of battle between the new opposition and the old order has been for seats on the poverty board organized under the community action program of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. In April 1969, after three years of internecine in-fighting, the liberal opposition—largely composed of the members of the CADC—was finally able to depose the Six Companies' man on the board, Chairman Dapien Liang, and to replace him with a chairman more to its liking. The Six Companies charged that the poverty board was dominated by "left-wing militants" but was unable to secure its complete control over Chinatown's poverty program. However, the Chinatown program is budgeted so far only to the beginning of 1970. If the program is scrapped, the arena of conflict and opposition in Chinatown may shift on to some other plane.

Another challenge to the old order has been hurled recently by ICSA. In August 1969 a news reporter interviewed Foo Hum, tea merchant, mogul in the Chinese Six Companies and representative on the Chinatown antipoverty board, concerning Chinatown's social problems. In addition to denying that the community's problems were either exclusive or very grave, Hum refuted the assertion that they were attributable to newly arrived immigrants. Then he launched into an attack on the native-born youth, especially the Red Guards and the ICSA and was quoted in the press as saying, "The Red Guards and the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action—theirs are Communist activities. They should not be blamed on the new immigrants." ICSA promptly filed a slander suit against Hum for \$100,000 general damages and \$10,000 punitive damages. Hum, backed by a Six Companies legal defense fund of \$10,000, refused to settle out of court to an offer made by Mason Wong, ICSA president, that the suit be dropped in return for Hum's writing a letter of apology and publishing it in all local papers, paying all legal fees that have arisen thus far and donating a token gift of money to ICSA.

The crust of Chinatown's cake of customary control may be beginning to crumble. The old order must contend not only with the mounting opposition of the community's respectable, professional and American-born younger and middle-aged adults, but also with the militant organization of Chinatown's disaffected youth. In addition, one cannot count on the new immigrants to bow to Chinatown's traditional power elite in the future as they have in the past.

It is by no means clear, however, what the outcome of this continuing power struggle will be. Chinatown's more liberal-minded leaders may defeat themselves by their ambiguous support of both progressive policies and a new racial consciousness. The former may call for a need to push for the introduction of unionization and other characteristic features of white America into Chinatown's anachronistic institutions. But the new ethnic consciousness, a consciousness that in its extreme forms opposes both the old order of transplanted Cathay and the middle-class ways of white America, may forbid cooperation with those institutions—progressive or not—that are dominated by Caucasians. It is in this possible paralysis that Chinatown's old order coalesces with its new rebels. Both seem to oppose the imposition of the metropolis upon the ghetto, but for quite different reasons. For the old elites any greater intrusion might undermine their exclusive and "extraterritorial" power; for the new rebels any intrusion might wrest away their newly discovered desire for ethnic self-determination. It would not be impossible for Chinatown's garment workers, as well as the community's other unprotected and impoverished denizens, to be caught helplessly in the vice of this excruciating cultural conflict.

Discrimination and National Oppression

Beyond the problems of the ghetto itself—some of which are typical of all poor ethnic enclaves in American cities, some of which are peculiarly Chinese—loom the attitude and action of the larger society. Chinatown's myth of social propriety, communal self-help, familial solidarity and a low crime rate was a carefully nurtured mystique, prepared to counteract the vicious stereotype of coolie laborers, immoral practices, murderous tong wars and inscrutable cunning that characterized the American white man's perspective. As a pervasive mystique coloring most reports of Chinatown for the past three decades, it has succeeded up to a point in its original purpose—to substitute a favorable stereotype for an unfavorable one. It had other latent functions as well, not the least of which was to protect the community's social and political structure from excessive scrutiny and destruction. So long as Chinatown could "contain" its problems, circumscribe its paragon institutions with bourgeois or innocuously exotic descriptions and control its members, the community was safe, and the city adopted a relaxed attitude toward its own cosmopolitan character.

But Chinatown's safety rests also on America's foreign relations with China. The repeal of the exclusion laws in 1943 was a gesture of reconciliation toward the country's wartime ally in the war against Japan, just as the incarceration of the Japanese-Americans during that same war was a hostile move against those Americans who had the misfortune to be physically identifiable with America's enemy. Aware of the dangerously changeable character of America's friendliness toward her racially visible peoples,

Chinatown has presented a picture of cultural identity with nineteenth-century Cathay and of moral sympathy for the Nationalist Regime in Taiwan. This is not a false picture, for the political identity of the aged aliens is of very low intensity, but if it must be linked to old China it is most probably to the Republic founded by Sun Yat Sen and continued under Chiang Kai-shek. The American-born Chi-



nese are not "Zionists" to any degree and therefore feel themselves to be Americans politically and socially and do not identify with either China. Even the Red Guard's rhetorical usage of Mao's book is more a symbol of an American rebellion than the substance of Communist affiliation. And the new immigrants have shown a profound disinterest in associating even with the symbols of Maoism.

Nevertheless, the fires of fear and prejudice are still kindled in America. Not only are acts of prejudice and discrimination still visited upon Chinese-Americans in everyday life, at least one agency of the government itself is still not wholly satisfied with the loyalty of Chinese in America. On 17 April 1969 J. Edgar Hoover testified before a subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations that "the blatant, belligerent and illogical statements made by Red China's spokesmen during the past year leave no doubt that the United States is Communist China's No. 1 enemy." Hoover went on to warn the subcommittee of Communist Chinese intelligence activity "overt and covert, to obtain needed material, particularly in the scientific field." After hinting darkly that a Chinese-American who served a 60-day sentence in prison for making a false customs declaration about electronic parts being sent to Hong Kong might have been an agent of a Communist country, Hoover asserted, "We are being confronted with a growing amount of work in being alert for Chinese Americans and others in this country who would assist Red China in supplying needed material or promoting Red Chinese propaganda." "For one thing," he continued, "Red China

has been flooding the country with its propaganda and there are over 300,000 Chinese in the United States, some of whom could be susceptible to recruitment either through ethnic ties or hostage situations because of relatives in Communist China." Hoover went on to say that "up to 20,000 Chinese immigrants can come into the United States each year and this provides a means to send illegal agents into our Nation." Hoover concluded his testimony on this point by asserting that "there are active Chinese Communist sympathizers in the Western Hemisphere in a position to aid in operations against the United States." Thus the Chinese in America were reminded that perhaps all their efforts at convincing white America that they were a peaceable, law-abiding, family-minded and docile people who contributed much and asked little in return had gone for naught. In time of crisis they too might suffer the same fate that overtook the highly acculturated Japanese-Americans a quarter century before—wholesale incarceration. When Hoover's remarks are coupled with the widespread report in 1966 that China's atomic bomb was "fathered" by Dr. Tsien Hwue-shen, an American-educated Chinese who was persecuted here for five years during the McCarthy era and then allowed to return to the country of his birth and citizenship, and with the fact that under Title II of the Emergency Detention Act of 1950 any person or group who is deemed to be a "threat to the internal security of the United States" may be incarcerated in the same detention camps in which the American Japanese were imprisoned, the safety of the Chinese in America from official persecution is by no means assured. The Chinese, of course, protested against Hoover's remarks, and one San Francisco paper labeled his testimony an irresponsible slur on "a large and substantial segment of American citizens." Meanwhile, Japanese-American, Chinese-American and several other kinds of organizations have joined together to attempt to get Congress to repeal the infamous Title II.

Race prejudice, as Herbert Blumer has reminded us, is a sense of group position. It arises out of the belief, supported and legitimated by various elites, that a racial group is both inferior and threatening. Such a belief may lie dormant beneath the facade of a long-term racial accommodation, made benign by a minority group's tacit agreement to live behind the invisible, but no less real for that, wall of a ghetto. Then when circumstances seem to call for new meanings and different explanations, the allegedly evil picture and supposedly threatening posture may be resuscitated to account for political difficulties or social problems that seem to defy explanation.

History, however, does not simply repeat itself. There is a new Chinatown and new sorts of Chinese in America. The old order holds its power precariously in the ghetto, and the new liberals and the now vocal radicals bid fair to supplant them and try new solutions to the old problems. Finally, the Japanese experience of 1942 may not be repeated either because the United States has learned that lesson too well or because too many Americans would not let it happen again.

Coming In May

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The Algerian Revolution

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Money Worries

Peter Passell and Leonard M. Roth

Children's Response to Fine Art

Irving L. Child
