



**1882**  
FOUNDATION



**CHINESE  
AMERICAN  
MUSEUM**

# Chinese American Women in History Conference

OCT. 24-26, 2019  
WASHINGTON, DC



# AWARD RECEPTION

The evening before the Chinese American Women in History Conference, the 1882 Foundation and Chinese American Museum in Washington, DC (CAM DC) held an evening awards presentation and private reception at the Museum. Guests mingled and explored the exhibits at a pre-opening of the museum. David Uy, Executive Director of CAM DC, and Jenny Liu, Founder of CAM DC, welcomed guests to the reception. Ted Gong, Executive Director of the 1882 Foundation, formally introduced the inaugural Chinese American Women in History Conference and celebrated the scholars, historians, community leaders, and advocates whose work highlight Chinese American women.

Gong introduced Melanie Chan, National President of the Chinese American Citizens' Alliance (CACA), who presented the inaugural National Impact Award. The award, which honors individuals whose ambition and vision furthers the mission of CACA, was presented to Senator Tammy Duckworth for her role as author and primary sponsor of the Chinese American World War II Veteran Congressional Gold Medal Act. The Act honored the military service of the over 20,000 Chinese American servicemen and women in World War II, recognizing their loyalty and sacrifice. Benjamin Rhodside, a representative of the Senator, accepted the award on her behalf.

Gong went on to honor Organization of Chinese American Women (OCA-W) and its co-founder, the late Pauline Tsui. Christina Wong Poy, Administrative Director, Maryland Governor's Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, described OCA-W's mission and highlighted its decades of accomplishments before accepting the award on behalf of OCA-W and its founding members. A special award went to Dr. Betty Lee Sung, a pioneering scholar in Asian American Studies, original member of OCA-W and CACA, activist, and author.



Christine Wong Poy (left), Melanie Chan, Benjamin Rhodside, David Uy, and attendees



Dr. Betty Lee Sung

# ACTIVIST: MABEL PING-HUA LEE

## FEATURING

REVEREND BAYER LEE, DR. MEGAN  
SPRINGATE, MELANIE CHAN

Day One of the conference kicked off with breakfast and opening remarks from 1882 Foundation Executive Director Ted Gong. The first session of the conference featured a close examination of the life and accomplishments of Dr. Mabel Ping-Hua Lee, the first woman to earn a Ph.D. from Columbia University, a prominent figure in New York's Chinatown, and a fiercely devoted women's advocate for women's suffrage. The panel consisted of Reverend Bayer Lee of the First Chinese Baptist Church in New York's Chinatown, which was founded by Mabel's father; Dr. Megan Springate, National Coordinator of the National Park Service; and Melanie Chan, National President of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance.

Melanie Chan briefly introduced Dr. Mabel Lee's life and legacy, emphasizing her accomplishments as a pioneering activist-scholar. Born in 1897 in Guangzhou, China, Lee immigrated to the United States by 1905, settling down in New York City's Chinatown with her minister father. She attended Barnard College, where she studied history and philosophy and began her lifelong involvement in the struggle for women's equality. In college, Mabel Lee published numerous articles arguing for women's rights and equality. Dr. Mabel Lee completed her Ph.D. in Economics at Columbia University, where her research on the agricultural Chinese economy was lauded.

Chan next outlined Lee's suffragist activity, scholarly accomplishments in the field of Economics, and career path/contributions to the Chinese American community in New York's Chinatown. Chan tied Mabel Lee's historic precedents with contemporary issues in Chinese American politics and civic life, such as a lack of Chinese-American women in leadership positions and a voter turnout gap. In the suffrage movement, Lee played a key role in organizing Chinese American women through marches and parades. Beyond women's voting rights, Lee advocated for rural education and civic education for women. Chan read an excerpt from an essay Dr. Lee published in the New York Times on this topic. Chan highlighted Dr. Lee's continued advocacy and commitment to the Chinatown community until her death in 1966.

The next speaker, Dr. Springate, presented the National Park Service's initiatives to preserve the history of the 19th Amendment. These include the Women's History Website and the 20 Suffragists to Know for 2020 Project, in which Dr. Mabel Lee is represented.



**History is not the past. It is the stories we tell about the past. How we tell these stories... has a lot to do with whether we cut short or advance our evolution as human beings.**



Civil Rights Activist  
Grace Lee Boggs

Dr. Bayer Lee then narrated Dr. Mabel Lee's educational arc and her ties to New York's Chinatown and the First Chinese Baptist Church. He elaborated on Lee's leadership organizing Chinese American women in the suffrage movement. In 1917, Lee and the women's suffrage movement enjoyed a great success as women won the right to vote in New York State. Despite Lee's leadership in securing this victory, she was unable to exercise her right as the Chinese Exclusion Act barred her and other Chinese women in America from becoming naturalized citizens.

Although history frequently remembers the women's suffragists as white American women, Dr. Mabel Lee's contributions demonstrate the key role that Chinese American women selflessly played in the movement. Regarding Lee's legacy, Melanie Chan quoted Grace Lee Boggs, a Chinese American Civil Rights activist and scholar, who stated: "History is not the past. It is the stories we tell about the past. How we tell these stories – triumphantly or self-critically, metaphysically or dialectically – has a lot to do with whether we cut short or advance our evolution as human beings." This conference session concluded with a Q&A session with the audience.



Audience, first day



Mindy Liu (left) and Jenny Liu

# ARTIST: ANNA MAY WONG

## FEATURING

DR. SHIRLEY JENNIFER LIM,  
SALLY WEN MAO

Following the panel on Dr. Mabel Lee, Panel Two discussed the life of renowned actress Anna May Wong, her legacy, and her role in shaping the image of Chinese American women in the public consciousness. This panel featured Dr. Shirley Jennifer Lim, Associate Professor of History and affiliate in Women & Gender Studies, Asian-American Studies, and Africana Studies at State University of New York (SUNY) Stonybrook, and acclaimed poet Sally Wen Mao.

Lim has studied Anna May Wong extensively, publishing a comprehensive biography titled *Anna May Wong: Performing the Modern* in April 2019. Dr. Lim provided historical background on this early 20th-century Chinese American actress, covering Wong's birth in Los Angeles' Chinatown in 1905, her prolific international acting career, and her influences on Chinese American representation in Western media. Lim demonstrated that Anna May Wong was a versatile and exceptional performer, transitioning from silent to talking films and whose career spanned film, television, and radio.

Dr. Lim evaluated the impact of Wong's career, arguing that Wong shaped racial modernity, making her one of the most significant actresses of the 20th century. As an American born on American soil, Wong defied Orientalism and challenged gendered and racialized notions of the Chinese American as the perpetual "Other" and the woman as a "Damsel in Distress". Wong challenged yellowface, defying European theatrical norms of Orientalizing white actors. Furthermore, Lim showed clips, photographs, and recordings of Anna May Wong and highlighting her glamour and celebrity. She demonstrated how Anna May Wong paved the way for Chinese-American women to enter the public eye. Lim finally discussed the contemporary resurgence of interest in Anna May Wong, citing her evening dress which was included in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2010 exhibition "American Women: Fashioning a National Identity."

Following Dr. Lim's scholarly presentation, poet Sally Wen Mao read poems from her 2019 poetry collection, *Oculus*, which imagine Anna May Wong using a time machine to reflect upon her own legacy and later career and navigating contemporary cinema. Through this series, Mao uses Wong's trailblazing work to explore racialized gender roles and themes of performance, representation, digital visual culture, white and male gazes, and Asian futurity. Mao read her works entitled "The Toll of the Sea", "Anna May Wong Blows Out Sixteen Candles", and "Resurrection".

At the end of the session, Meera Munoz Pandya of the Smithsonian made a presentation about a collaborative postcard project featuring Anna May Wong and Sally Wen Mao's poetry involving the National Postal Museum, National Portrait Gallery, and Asian American Pacific Islander Center at the Smithsonian. She discussed the choice of medium, continuing the dialogue on the interplay between the visual image and the written word. The panelists then answered questions from the audience.



Dr. Shirley Jennifer Lim (left), Meera Munoz Pandya, Sally Wen Mao, Melissa Bisagni



Meera Munoz Pandya



Dr. Sojin Kim



Reverend Bayer Lee (left), Dr. Megan Springate, Melanie Chan

# POLICY TRACK

## IMMIGRATION AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION: THE 1945 WAR BRIDES ACT

FEATURING DR. VIVIAN LOUIE, JENNY CHAN, DR. JANELLE WONG

In the afternoon, the Conference attendees had the option of joining either the Policy Track or the Communities Track. The first panel in the Policy Track centered on the 1945 War Brides Act, which allowed the wives and children of American servicemen to legally immigrate to the United States post-World War II.

As a result of this Act, an unprecedented number of Chinese American women were able to immigrate to the United States because their soldier husbands had served in the war. The War Brides Act revolutionized Chinese American family life as families became reunited and unified for the first time. The panel featured Dr. Vivian Louie, Director of the Asian American Studies Center and Program at Hunter College, and Jenny Chan, co-founder of Pacific Atrocities Education, with moderator Dr. Janelle Wong, Professor of American Studies and Asian American Studies at University of Maryland.

Louie began by establishing the historical context, pivotal moments, and immigration policies and rulings that paved the way for the 1945 War Brides Act. Following the surge of Chinese men immigrating to the United States during the Gold Rush, anti-Chinese xenophobia spiked among the white working-class who felt their jobs were being taken away. The Page Law of 1875 barred women from “Oriental” countries from entering the United States, vilifying them as “prostitutes”. The various Chinese Exclusion Acts began in 1882 and severely limited the number of new Chinese immigrants; however, in 1943, Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Laws due to its wartime alliance with China.

Jenny Chan took the stage to discuss the War Brides Act and World War II. Prior to World War II, the 1924 Immigration Act established a national origins quota for immigrants based on the 1890 Census. Using this standard, the Act disproportionately targeted Asians who were not well represented in the 1890 Census and effectively closed off immigration from East Asian nations. The 1945 War Brides Act allowed exceptions from the 1924 Immigration Act for WWII soldiers who sought to bring wives and women they had met abroad into the United States. Chan drew from historical documents, personal accounts, and images to examine a few case studies of war brides from China, the Philippines, and other East Asian nations.



Dr. Vivian Louie (left) and Jenny Chan



Dr. Janelle Wong

Louie continued the discussion on Chinese American families and community formation. Following the 1924 Immigration Act, split households formed as Chinese men in the United States had to leave their wives behind in China. She examined the gendered and sociological effects of split households. While Chinese men earned U.S. dollars that allowed them economic advantages over their wives, they also became emasculated in popular culture and pushed out from labor sectors in America. As a result of their marginalization, many Chinatowns developed because these men established businesses to serve the local Chinese communities.

The influx of Chinese women who immigrated to the United States as a result of the War Brides Act included older wives, younger and newly married wives, and children. Chinese American life transformed from a bachelor society to a gender-balanced society and then to a family-based society. Louie described the challenges that newly unified Chinese American families faced in the United States, including substandard housing, linguistic barriers, poor health, and more, all without a robust social safety net. With the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, Chinese Americans gained access to new sectors of society and increased economic opportunity, though ethnic Chinese American enclaves continued to flourish.

After the two presentations, Dr. Janelle Wong initiated the panel discussion. She tied the War Brides Act to contemporary debates on family-based immigration -- “chain migration” -- which has been a target of President Trump’s administration, and immigrants’ access to social services. At the end, Dr. Wong opened the panel up for a Q&A session with the audience.

# POLICY TRACK

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS POST-WORLD WAR II

FEATURING ARYANI ONG, SUSAN YU, HENRY LEE, GINNY GONG

The second panel in the Policy Track explored the lives of Chinese American women post-World War II. The speakers were activist and blogger Aryani Ong; Susan Yu, whose mother was one of the first emigres entering the US after the repeal of Chinese Exclusion Acts; Henry Lee, whose mother was a war bride; and Ginny Gong— an activist, community advocate, host of the cable TV show “East Meets West” and a first-generation Chinese immigrant. Ong served as the moderator and introduced the panel, in addition to contributing.

Focusing on the period between the War Brides Act of 1945 and the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, the panelists shared the narratives of pioneering women during this time, examining their struggles, cultural arcs, and impact on Chinese American society. Each speaker presented their stories for approximately 10 minutes, then received audience questions individually during a short Q&A. A moderated discussion followed, then the panel took more audience questions.

Henry Lee, the first presenter, described his grandfather and great-grandfather’s experiences as the railroad workers and elaborated upon the male-dominated Chinese culture of the American West, particularly in Washington and Oregon. During World War II, the demographic of Chinese in the West shifted dramatically as many Chinese men were drafted into the war. As they arrived back in the United States, many of those men brought their wives and girlfriends from China back through the provisions of the War Bridges Act of 1945. Lee’s mother was one of these women. Lee elaborated upon the cultural challenges and linguistic barriers that his mother faced as she transitioned to life in America, as well as the community she helped build of other newly-arrived Chinese immigrants and family members that Lee’s mother built.

Susan Yu followed, reflecting on her mother Helen’s life and immigration to the U.S. in 1944. Yu discussed her mother’s emigration and adjustment to life in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, drawing from newspaper articles and other primary sources from the period. Yu honored her mother’s fearlessness in the face of challenge and discrimination and her willingness to take risks and break from tradition. Yu noted her mother’s many roles as a household manager, wife, mother, and store-keeper.



Aryani Ong (left), Henry Lee, Susan Yu, and Ginny Gong

Through her remembrance of her mother, Yu touched upon themes of intergenerational trauma, healing, the multiple roles— public and private— that immigrant women of color are forced into, and the many pitfalls they face and overcome. Finally, she talked about the process of healing from intergenerational trauma— a challenge that many immigrants and children of immigrants face.

Finally, Ginny Gong presented her experience as a first-generation Chinese immigrant. Honoring her matrilineal lineage, Gong discussed the resilience, sacrifice, and assertiveness of her mother. Gong described her immigration with her family in the 1950's, describing the reverberations of the Chinese Exclusion Act, her father's service in World War II which allowed him to claim U.S. citizenship, and the hurdles she and her family overcame in order to become American.

Following their presentations, the panelists began a moderated conversation. Panelists shared their families' perspectives on the Chinese Exclusion Acts, then took questions from the audience in an extended Q&A session.



**When I allow myself to feel joy, I'm expressing gratitude to all the obstacles my great-grandmother and her mother had to overcome. With each moment we decide to love ourselves better, we are creating a micro-revolution within our lineage, breaking away from chains of pain.**



Artist Connie Lim,  
quoted by Susan Yu

# COMMUNITIES TRACK

## GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION: CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE SOUTH

FEATURING ADRIENNE BERARD, CRYSTAL KWOK, REGINA CHOW MCPHIE

Concurrent to the Policy Track, the Communities Track featured stories of Chinese American women in various communities, centering on themes of oral history and the storytelling tradition. The first event in the Communities Track, titled “Geography and Cultural Preservation: Chinese American Women in the Jim Crow South,” featured journalist and scholar Adrienne Berard; actor, director, and talk show host Crystal Kwok; and Regina Chow Mcphie, who is a retired EEO officer of FEMA’s DC Office. The moderator was Rachel Lee, of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University. Berard, author of *When Yellow Was Black: The Untold Story of the First Fight for Desegregation in Southern Schools*, presented a historical overview of the 1927 *Lum v. Rice* Supreme Court Case. In this case, the highest court upheld the exclusion of Chinese American children from public high schools did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted citizenship and “equal protection” to all individuals born or naturalized in the United States. Prior to the ruling, anti-Chinese immigration sentiment was pervasive as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was the first law denying entry for a group of people on the basis of race or national origin. Following the Act, the first wave of undocumented Chinese immigration created the category of the “illegal immigrant,” which persists to this day.

In this context, Katherine Lum (née Katherine Wong), who had come to the American South as a young indentured servant. She married Jeu Gong Lum, another Chinese immigrant, with whom she raised three children. In 1924, Katherine’s children were denied entry to the white public school in Rosedale, Mississippi. Katherine refused to send her children to the segregated Black school, instead suing the school officials. The case, *Gong Lum v. Rice*, eventually made its way to the Supreme Court, where the Court upheld that exclusion of a child from a public school on the basis of his or her Chinese ancestry did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. The case was later used as argument in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, though the Supreme Court ultimately ruled *de jure* racial segregation unconstitutional.

Crystal Kwok emphasized the importance of oral histories in the Chinese American tradition, noting that stories that are not told or represented in mainstream media survived through informal means. Kwok presented a showreel with a selection of these Chinese American women, particularly those “unruly women” who defied expectations.

She showed a documentary on her grandmother, Pearl, who ran away, and noted the strange position Chinese Americans occupied in the time of Jim Crow segregation as Chinese were caught in a binary dichotomy, neither Black nor white.

Following Kwok, Regina Chow Mcphie shared her personal story growing up in segregated Washington DC. At the predominantly Caucasian school, Chow Mcphie discussed her experiences with anti-Chinese racism and exclusion, including corporal punishment that she faced as a result of speaking Chinese. Later, she transferred to a predominantly Black school which was a much more positive experience.

After Chow Mcphie and Kwok discussed their own experiences, academic Adrienne Berard provided more insight into the historic context of Lum v. Rice. Moderator Rachel Lee then presented the panel. On the subject of Asian families who encouraged children to assimilate to white cultural norms and the possibility of moving beyond individual interests to foster cross-racial solidarity, Chow noted that Asians must be willing to speak up and move beyond the Black/white dichotomy. Kwok shared her story of a cousin who lived in Mississippi and married a Black man; as a result of their children's biracial status, they faced stigma and discrimination. Finally, Lee asked the panelists to discuss Asian American reactions to the Civil Rights Movement. Kwok noted that the movement divided the Asian community as some Chinese resonated with the movement while others became resentful when their properties or businesses were damaged in movement protests. At the end, the panelists fielded questions from audience members.



Crystal Kwok (left), Regina Chow Mcphie, Adrienne Berard



Rachel Lee

# COMMUNITIES TRACK

## WOMEN AS CULTURAL CARRIERS IN RURAL CHINATOWNS

FEATURING DR. SUE FAWN CHUNG, EVELYN HANG YIN

The second panel in this Track discussed Chinese Americans in rural Chinatowns, shifting focus from the dominant narrative of urban Chinatowns into these long-neglected ethnic and cultural centers. The panel featured Dr. Sue Fawn Chung, Professor Emerita of History at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in conversation with Evelyn Hang Yin, an MFA student at the California Institute of the Arts who has been documenting images and oral histories of the Hanford Chinese American community in California's San Joaquin Valley and the preservation of its Chinatown.

## WRAP-UP AND FILM SCREENING

FEATURING DR. SOJIN KIM, ROBIN LUNG, DR. GREG MARK

Concluding Day One's formal events, Dr. Sojin Kim of the Smithsonian Institution recapped the Policy and Community Tracks to the reconvened audience, and Conference panelists and presenters presented their key takeaways to the group. In the evening, the 1882 Foundation held a free public screening of two films at University of California Washington Center: the Robin Lung-directed documentary "Finding Kukan", centering on the life and exploits of Li Ling-Ai, an uncredited film producer on a film which brought the atrocities of World War II in China to the public consciousness, and Progressive Era silent film "The Curse of Quon Gwon," directed by Marion E. Wong. Robin Lung and Marion E. Wong's grand-nephew, Dr. Greg Mark, Professor of Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies at California State University, Sacramento, attended the film screenings.



Audience members listen to Dr. Sue Fawn Chung and Evelyn Hang Yin



Dr. Sue Fawn Chung (left) and Evelyn Hang Yin in conversation

# FILM DISCUSSION

## FEATURING

ALEXANDRA HSU, ROBIN LUNG,  
DR. GREG MARK

Day Two of the Conference was designed to be a Community Day, providing the opportunity for local residents to participate. Following breakfast, the day began with Ted Gong's opening remarks, which emphasized the day's core themes of storytelling, historical preservation, and community knowledge-sharing. Gong introduced 1882 Foundation Talk Story Program Director Stan Lou, who outlined the day's agenda and kicked off the activities. Noting that "the state of our community lies in the power of the stories we tell", Lou turned the mic over to Jenny Cho for the panel discussion about the two films screened the previous evening.

Author Jenny Cho moderated the community discussion of the films. The panel featured filmmakers Robin Lung and Alexandra Hsu, as well as Dr. Greg Mark, the great-nephew of the filmmaker Marion E. Wong. Cho first inquired about each filmmaker's personal journey and the relationship between his or her work and social justice. First, Mark spoke about his discovery of his great-aunt's film after seeing the 35mm film reels in his grandparents' basement. This encounter with family history began around 1968, when Mark was a student at University of California, Berkeley, striking for the establishment of an Asian American Studies program. Next, Lung spoke about her path into filmmaking, which she accidentally fell into after studying English and Art at Stanford University. She quickly recognized the dearth of Chinese American stories and representations in film and sought to portray these stories, particularly stories similar to her own cultural background as a Chinese-American Hawaiian. Having stumbled upon the forgotten narrative of Li Ling-Ai, Lung quickly became mesmerized by the rule-breaking Chinese American film producer who would eventually become the subject of "Finding Kukan." Alexandra Hsu, great-granddaughter of poet Xu Zhimo, shared her path into filmmaking, describing the role of her artistically engaged family in fostering her development. In high school, Hsu became increasingly interested in film before studying Media Studies in college.

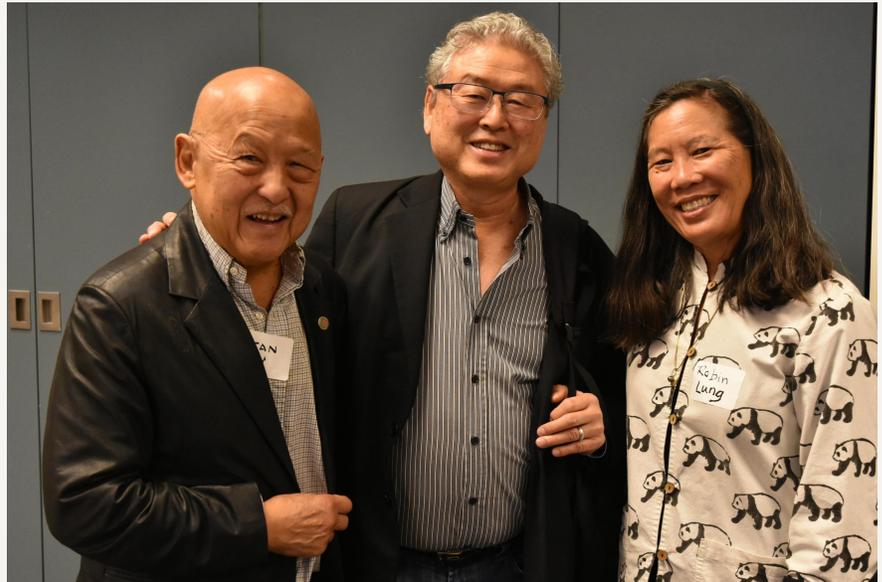
The panel then discussed the challenges of being an Asian American filmmaker. Mark presented on the history and making of "The Curse of Quon Gwon", noting its prominence as the first Asian American film and its placement in 2006 in the National Film Registry. Mark traced his family lineage and tree, as "The Curse of Quon Gwon" featured a cast primarily of the director's relatives. He further described the context, production, and legacy of the film.

Lung then discussed her research and information-gathering process on Li Ling-Ai, emphasizing Li's letters and memoir *Life Is For a Long Time*. Lung stressed the difficulty of this endeavor and shared the insight that in this generation, women's stories and legacies were carried forth by their progeny. If a woman chose not to have children, as Li did, the process of uncovering her full story later on became much more difficult. Initially, Lung did not hope to appear in the film and rejected the idea of emphasizing or exposing her directorial subjectivity. Eventually, Lung realized that documenting the story accurately required that she be honest with herself and not shy away from her role in the documentary.

Hsu showed some samples of her work and shared the challenges of narrative filmmaking. She further described her family history and involvement in the arts and film, as well as her understanding of the contemporary Asian American film landscape. She touched upon the particular challenges that women filmmakers face, including underrepresentation in directorial positions. Finally, the panelists answered questions from the audience.



Films shown were *Finding Kukan* (2016) at top, and *The Curse of Quon Gwon* (prod. 1916-17, released 2005) at bottom



Stan Lou (left), Dr. Greg Mark, and Robin Lung

# WRITERS PANEL

## FEATURING

LESLIE LI, VERONICA LI, LILY  
LIU

Next, authors Veronica Li, Lily Liu, and Leslie Li shared their insights on recording, writing, and editing family histories in a panel moderated by Stan Lou. The expert writers spoke about their journeys into writing and editing professions. Leslie Li discussed the process of researching and writing her novel, based on her grandfather – Li Zogren, the first democratically elected Vice President of China – and her grandmother, in addition to her memoir reflecting upon her upbringing, and her companion book to the documentary “The Kim Loo Sisters.” An excerpt of the documentary was shown to the audience.

Writer and translator Lily Liu reflected upon her upbringing in a predominantly white East Coast community. She reflected upon the acts of interpretation and translation and their relationships to geospatial migration from East Asia to America and back. Liu examined her parents’ refugee history in China and familial immigration to the United States, noting how critical it is to preserve intimate histories and honor the specificity of memory. Liu then shared her journey into writing and translating, which for her is deeply intertwined with her desire to understand the stories of her mother and family at large.

Veronica Li followed up and began with her background as a first-generation Chinese American whose family immigrated to the U.S. following the 1965 Immigration Act. She later pursued a B.A. in English from University of California, Berkeley, pursued international affairs, and came back to writing later. Li elaborated on the three books that she has published – a memoir of her mother’s life and two novels. Stating that “writing is my way of trying to make sense of life,” Li dove into her experience of caring for her aging parents in her novel *Confucius Says* and her process of memorializing her mother’s stories and providing an account of her mother’s life in the memoir *Journey Across the Four Seas*. Li noted that many of her friends regretted not interviewing their parents before they passed away, but encouraged the audience to begin writing down their own stories and recollections from their family members. Li ended by saying: “Every person is different, and every community has its own story. It is important that we, as Chinese Americans, weave our stories into the multicultural fabric of America. We have to take part in the conversation on who we are and who we want to be.”

Lou thanked the panelists before asking for questions from the audience.

# WRITERS WORKSHOP

LED BY MAY CHEH

Following the writing panel, May Cheh of the 1882 Foundation facilitated a writers' workshop of small group discussions of attendees' pre-submitted writing samples. Each small group spent time to read and discuss one pre-submitted story. The small groups reported back to the larger group with highlights and insights from their discussions focusing on how to improve the writing of our own stories. The authors from the writing panels each joined one of the small groups to offer advice on writing mechanics and provide guidance on how to get works published. The submitted stories that were discussed are listed below:

Cheh, May. "Airplane to Gold Mountain."

Cheu, Richard. "Nellie Ohn Cheu: Chinese American Woman Pioneer in Medicine and Education."

Chow, Rita. "A Tailor's Daughter."

Liu, Lily. "Parting."

Lou, Stan. "My Story of Identity"

Phipps, Lia. "Middle Fingers."

Yang, Ren. "Floating."



Dr. Sue Fawn Chung (left) and Jenny Chan



Veronica Li (left), Leslie Li, Lily Liu, and Stan Lou

# TELLING STORIES, TALKING HISTORY

## FEATURING

DR. SUE FAWN CHUNG, RUTH  
TAM, STAN LOU



Ruth Tam (left) and Dr. Sue Fawn Chung

In the final “Telling Stories, Talking History” event, Stan Lou of the 1882 Foundation, writer/illustrator/audio producer Ruth Tam, and Dr. Sue Fawn Chung discussed oral histories and creative approaches to historical storytelling. Chung first expanded upon her own experiences creating an oral history project, starting in 1964 with a grant she received to start the Chinese History Society of America (CHSA) program. Having identified oral histories as the best medium for democratizing history, Chung shared her advice for starting an oral history project; conducting research on the historical, social, and environmental contexts in which a subject lived; incorporating visual elements to a project such as old family photos or photographs from the time period; and publicizing one’s work. Chung then discussed the “shitaba” form, which was a historical character performance and one way of telling an oral history.

The panel discussion pivoted to Ruth Tam, who is a first-generation Chinese American journalist in Washington, D.C. She discussed her experiences writing about family history for the Washington Post through the experiences of food and National Parks, offering advice on publishing reflective opinion pieces in mainstream media outlets. Tam described the difference between writing a piece for publication and writing for oneself, noting that for a piece to be published the topic must be of relevance to a broader moment or conversation. However, in writing about personal and familial experiences, Tam noted that storytellers must be sensitive to the ethics of storytelling and make sure their interviewees and subjects understand what their story will be used for with full, informed consent. Tam and Chung answered audience inquiries at the end.

# OPEN MIC & CLOSING REMARKS

The Conference concluded with an animated Open Mic session where audience participants stepped up to the microphone to share their stories about their families, Chinese American history, or any other topic, as well as their jokes and thoughts. The session included a tribute and thanks to Ali Smith, long time, irreplaceable staff member at 1882 Foundation who leaves the Foundation to pursue a doctorate program in New York.

In their Closing Remarks, 1882 Foundation Executive Director Ted Gong and CAMDC Executive Director David Uy thanked the attendees for participating in the inaugural conference and invited everyone to join in a group photo.



Community Day attendees pose for a photo at the conclusion of the Conference



**It is important that we, as Chinese Americans, weave our stories into the multicultural fabric of America. We have to take part in the conversation on who we are and who we want to be.**



Author Veronica Li