

Gim Suey Chong – His Life From Hoyping To Gum Saan

By Raymond Chong

My interest in tracking my ancestral roots began in the year 2003. A series of subliminal moments led to this personal odyssey to discover my own ethnic identity in America and to learn more about Gim Suey Chong, my father. Between late January and late March, two friends and two relatives died. With their deaths, I felt a compelling need to connect closer with my family and to understand my ancestral heritage. Bill Moyers' special "Becoming American: The Chinese Experience" reminded me that Gim Suey Chong was part of the Chinese immigration saga as he struggled in Gum Saan. In late June at a friend's 80th birthday, I met my father's crew chief, from when they maintained the China Clipper seaplane on Treasure Island in 1943.

It has been a poignant journey these past five years. My genealogical research revealed that my father quietly led an extraordinary life. I have retraced his footsteps in Boston Chinatown; Little Tokyo, Los Angeles; San Francisco Chinatown; Los Angeles Chinatown; and finally in Hoyping, China. In each place, I met and talked with his acquaintances. The climax was my return to my paternal ancestral village, Yung Lew Gong Village in Hoyping, in fall 2007 and later in summer 2008. After more than a half century, I have reclaimed our ancestral home. I received that Zhang zupu that traced my male lineage back to 1506 to the Ming Dynasty. The Zhang elders honored me with a lion dance. This journey has come full circle. My heart and body is in America but my mind and soul lie in China.

Prelude - Hoyping

Pearl River Delta

Gim Suey Chong (Zhang Jin Rui), my father, was from Hoyping County in the fertile Pearl River Delta of China. He was the son of Moi Chung (Zhang Mei Xin) and Cun Chuen Wong (Huang Qin Chun). He was born on December 26, 1922, in Yung Lew Gong (Yang Lu Gang)

Village, Hoyping County (Kaiping) of Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province.

The farming village lies within the fertile Pearl River Delta, surrounded by rice fields, vegetable plots, and the Yung Gong stream on the east and the Suey Gon stream on the west. A community *diaolou*, a gate tower, protects the village from bandits. A wealthy Jeung (Zhang) family owns another *diaolou*, a residential tower.

Sek Chyun Ji (Shi Quan Zi) ancestral hall is in the square. The founder of the village was Sia Chwen Gon (Shi Quan Gong). Our ancestors are buried on the ancestral hill of Fei All Sam (Fei E Shan) (“Hill of Flying Swan”). Gim attended Man Dak (Min De) elementary school in the ancestral hall. Chek Seui (Chishui) Town is down the road.



Yung Lew Gong Village with *diaolou* in background in Hoyping in 2007.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Hoy Lun Chung (Zhang Pei Lan), my great-grandfather, was the father of Moi Chung. Shee Lee was his wife. They had two children: Moi Chung and a daughter. In the late 19th century, Hoy Lun Chung went to America—known to the Chinese as Gum Saan (“Gold Mountain”)—in the first wave of emigrants from Yang Lu Gang Village. He worked in America as a contract laborer and returned to Hoyping a rich man. He became a merchant with his partner, Pui Mou Jeung (Zhang Pei Mu), in a dry goods

market called Daai Suen (Da Xin) (“Grand Credit”) across Sa Jau (Sha Zhou) River in the town of Baksa (Baisha) in Toisan (Taishan) County. Hoy Lun Chung had business investments in San Francisco, CA; Cambridge, MA; and Springfield, IL, and he wanted his son, Moi Chung, to carry on his success in America.



Baksa Market in Toisan in 2007.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Hoy Lun Chung was very successful man in his village. He was a respected village chief who gave sound advice. The family’s home had two bedrooms, two kitchens, lofts, etc. Outside it had a brick façade with a wood frame. Situated among the tight cluster of homes in narrow alleys, it was the ninth house on the sixth alley of the village. Hoy Lun Chung’s nephew, Whai Soon Cheung (Zhang Huai Xin), lived on the seventh house.

Moi Chung, my grandfather, was married to Shee Leung who died early in their marriage. Together they had a daughter, Suey Fong Chong, born in 1912. They also had an adopted son, Bow Fui Chong (Zhang Bao Hui).

Act I. Gum Saan

San Francisco Chinatown

Moi Chung immigrated to Gum Saan aboard S.S. *Mongolia* steamer, which carried 1,818 passengers, grossed 13,639 tons, and had a speed of 16 knots. Moi Chung arrived at the Port of San Francisco in California on June 17, 1912, where he was briefly interviewed at the Angel Island Immigration Station. He attended Ng Lee Mission School under sponsorship of Miss Ida Greenlee, while residing at 658 DuPont Street (now known as Grant Avenue) in San Francisco Chinatown at the Jeang Sing Kee (Chong Sing) Company, a seller of Chinese dry goods and food products. Hoy Lun Chung, his father, became a silent partner of the company that same year. Moi Chung later became a silent partner as well.



Moi Chung.
(Courtesy of National Archives &
Records Administration)



San Francisco Chinatown.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

New England

In 1917, Moi Chung moved to New England to work as manager at the Imperial Restaurant in Cambridge, of which his father, Hoy Lun Chung, was a silent partner. It was near Boston Chinatown, the center of the Chinese community in New England. Howard For Chew (Ah For Chew) was the principal owner of Imperial Restaurant, which he started in 1917. He also owned the Nanking Restaurant in Springfield, IL. His wife was Florence. Moi Chung worked there until 1919.

On December 1, 1919, Moi Chung became a partner with a \$500 share of the Royal Restaurant, located at 16 Harrison Avenue in Boston Chinatown, near Phillip's Square. He was a partner from 1919 to 1921. Royal Restaurant was a first-class restaurant serving Chinese and American customers; it consisted of two floors with 100 seats. The business had capital of \$15,490 with 42 silent partners and 5 active partners. Moi Chung was restaurant manager who oversaw a cashier, Ng Chung; a waiter, Quong Kwok Kee; a cook, Foon Wong; and a kitchen helper, Lang Yow. Royal Restaurant was generating \$6,000 per month in sales, and Moi Chung received a \$90 monthly salary. Connected with the Royal Restaurant was the a grocery store, Quong Shue Lung Company, Importers of Merchandise, located at 2 Oxford Place. Moi Chung lived and worked among a bachelor community of few women and few children. They were a fraternity of brothers who had left their wives in China.



Royal Restaurant on Harrison Avenue in Boston Chinatown.
(Courtesy of Chinese Historical Society of New England)

Moi Chung returned to China as a merchant for the Royal Restaurant. He departed on June 16, 1921, from the Port of Vancouver, aboard R.M.S. *Empress of Asia*. He returned to Yung Lew Gong Village, where he married Cun Chuen Wong (Huang Qin Chun) on December 1, 1921. A year later, Gim Suey Chong, my father, was born.



From left to right: Yuy Some Cheung, Moi Chung, Hoy Lun Chung, Gim Suey Chong in 1923. (Courtesy of Chong Family)

Moi Chung returned to America from the Port of Hong Kong aboard S.S. *President Grant*. He arrived at the Port of Seattle on July 27, 1923.

Moi Chung became a partner of Imperial Restaurant in Central Square of Cambridge on December 1, 1923. He brought \$700 interest from Hoy Lun Chung, his father. Imperial Restaurant had 33 silent partners, 7 active partners, and capital of \$13,500. They were generating \$4,000 per month in revenues, and Moi Chung received \$100 monthly salary. As restaurant manager, he oversaw a cashier, Ah For Ju (Howard Chew); a chief cook, Chu Chung; three cooks: Chu Jung Yu, Chu Yick Yin, and Gim Ling; and a waiter, Shuck Quan.

Imperial Restaurant was a high-class restaurant with white tablecloths served by waiters, with the capacity to seat 170 people. Located on the second floor of the Holmes Block, a three-story brick block with

mansard roof, it had three dining halls, a kitchen, and a storeroom. It was known for Chinese and American dishes, especially Chop Suey. It served turkey for lunch on Sundays. It employed one Caucasian porter, and at another time, three Caucasian waitresses.

In 1930, Moi Chung rented the Imperial Restaurant building at a monthly rate of \$465. According to the 1930 census, in addition to Moi Chung, ten partners/lodgers were listed with occupations as waiters, cooks, and cashiers.

Central Square, the site of Imperial Restaurant, is centered on the junction of Massachusetts Avenue, Prospect Street, and Western Avenue. Several Cambridge neighborhoods meet at Central Square. Central Square is the seat of government in Cambridge—Cambridge City Hall, the Cambridge Police Department, and Cambridge Post Office are located in this area. Central Square has long been known for its wide variety of ethnic restaurants and bars, and as a commercial and retail center for Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).



Imperial Restaurant in Cambridge in 1919.
(Courtesy of Cambridge Historical Commission)

Epic Journey

At the age of nine, after a bittersweet farewell to his mother, Cun Chuen Wong, and his half-sister, Suey Fong Chong, my father, Gim, left Yung Lew Gong Village. He walked to Baksa and took a train and a ferryboat to Hong Kong for his epic journey to Gum Saan. He stayed in Hong Kong for ten days in March 1932. As a sojourner, he departed on March 25, 1932, from Hong Kong, China, on R.M.S. *Empress of Asia*. In the steerage class, he was accompanied by Hung Quock Chong (Zhang Guo Xiang), his “paper father” (see affidavit and certificate of identify), who was a restaurant cook who had lived at 17 Tyler Street in Boston Chinatown. A “family friend,” Mee Fong Gee, also joined them on the ocean journey.



Gim Suey Chong in 1932.
(Courtesy of National Archives & Records Administration)

The Canadian Pacific Steamships (“World’s Greatest Travel System”) were known as the largest and fastest liners on the Pacific Ocean to and from Asia. They showed off white hulls with blue ribbons and with huge buff funnels as they plied the Oriental waters on their trans-Pacific runs. The R.M.S. *Empress of Asia*, one of *The White Empresses of the Pacific*, was a steamship of 16,090 tons, 19 knots, and 1,118 passengers. Along the trans-Pacific “White Empress Route,” Gim and his companions saw the great seaports of Shanghai (on March 28), Nagasaki (on March 29), Kobe (on March 31), Yokohama (on April 2), and Victoria on Vancouver Island.



The White Empresses of the Pacific ad
(Courtesy of Canadian Pacific Railroad Archives)



Certificate of Identity of Gim Suey Chong in 1932.
(Courtesy of National Archives & Records Administration)

After 19 days of ocean travel, my father arrived at the Port of Vancouver on April 13, 1932. He boarded the No. 2 “*Imperial Limited*” Vancouver–Montreal Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) train, which pulled coaches and sleepers. His 2,881–mile transcontinental journey from the CPR Vancouver Waterfront Station, through the towering Canadian Rocky Mountains and sweeping prairies, to CPR Windsor Station in Montreal, Quebec, took about 100 hours (four days). From Montreal, he took a CPR train to CPR Saint John Station in New Brunswick. The Canadian Pacific S.S. *Princess Helene*, a Bay of Fundy ship, ferried him to CPR Digby Station in Nova Scotia, to his final destination of the old Dominion Atlantic Railway Yarmouth Station.

On April 19, 1932, from the Port of Yarmouth on the Atlantic Coast, Gim departed on S.S. *Yarmouth*, the Boston–Yarmouth Line of the Eastern Steamship Lines. The next day, April 20, 1932, he arrived in the Port of Boston. On the Boston waterfront—after 26 days of ocean and train travel—he touched the golden soil of Gum Saan.



Boston Harbor.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

On arrival, Gim was held in the detention facility of the East Boston office of the Immigration & Naturalization Service of the U.S. Department of Labor. Under the Chinese Division, he was interviewed for admission by James E. Fitzgerald, inspector. On April 25, 1932, the officials admitted Gim Suey Chong, as son of Hung Quock Chong, American citizen. Afterwards, Gim excitedly met Moi Chung, his real father. Hung Quock Chong died on February 4, 1964; he is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery with other Chinese sojourners.

Cambridge

Gim lived with his father, Moi Chung, in the old Holmes Block on the second floor of 2 Central Square in Cambridgeport, which housed Imperial Restaurant that Moi Chung managed. Gim had to quickly learn English, the language of his adopted country, and the American way.

The population of the City of Cambridge was about 110,000. Central Square was the retail and entertainment center for the neighborhoods of Cambridgeport and MIT. People shopped for groceries at Manhattan Market and brought clothes at J. H. Corcoran's & Company Department Store. They enjoyed a wide range of ethnic foods at restaurants. On Friday and Saturday evenings, they were entertained by motion

pictures and vaudeville at the Olympic Theatre and Gordon's Central Square Theatre; they also drank and danced at nightclubs and bars. On Sundays, families worshipped at the First Baptist Church.

The Boston Elevated Railway Company operated the Cambridge Main Street Subway. The Central Station was on Massachusetts Avenue. Trolley streetcars connected Central Square to greater Boston. The Nabisco (National Biscuit Company) bakery was a major employer in Cambridge.

Scholars from China attended MIT and Harvard University, and each had several Chinese student clubs on campus, including the Chinese Students' Alliance in the United States of America, which was involved in political and social activities and events. Also in the neighborhood was the Chin family, who operated Oriental Restaurant on Massachusetts Avenue; the Dong family ran a Chinese laundry on Norfolk Street.

Gim attended Webster School of Cambridge Public Schools at 15 Upton Street, a brick façade three-story building. The school had 35 kids per class with wood desks on wood floors with wonderful teachers. Whites and Blacks were segregated with few Asian students. Gim carried his books in a shopping bag. After school, he returned to Imperial Restaurant to do chores in the kitchen. He slept in the storeroom.

Departure

Due to the economic downturn of the Great Depression, Imperial Restaurant was failing, so Moi Chung sold his share of the business. In the summer of 1936, Gim and his father left New England for a new life in California, "The Golden State." With their meager possessions, they departed from the South Station of Boston to transit through the Union Station of Chicago. They finally arrived at the old Southern Pacific Railroad/Union Pacific Railroad Station in Downtown Los Angeles. Gim and Moi began a new chapter in Gum Saan in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles near City Hall.

Act II. Little Tokyo

Arrival

"LITTLE TOKYO" EAST FIRST STREET, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

T231



East First Street of Little Tokyo.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Yet Quong Low Chop Suey Cafe

Gim lived and studied in bustling Little Tokyo—the biggest enclave of Japanese in America—from about 1936 to 1943, with his father, Moi Chung. Moi Chung worked as a waiter at Yet Quong Low (“Sun Light Building”) Chop Suey Café at 339 ½ East First Street, also known as Nikko Low Chinese Restaurant among the Issei and Nisei community. The café specialized in the Chop Suey version of “China-Meshi,” which was extremely popular among the Japanese American community. The café was founded around 1913 by Lung Fong and his two brothers; Lung was married to Hanako Nishii, an Issei from Wakayama Prefecture.

After school, Gim worked as a busboy to earn food and boarding. He and Moi Chung slept in the storage room of the café. Gim missed his mother as he was growing up.



**Lung Fong in front of Yet Quong Low in Little Tokyo after World War II.
(Courtesy of Henry Fong)**

Yet Quong Low had a banquet room for up to 200 people. A dining room of six tables was in front. The café served chow mein, beer, and wine. Japanese farmers were regular customers after they delivered fruits and vegetables to the Produce Market. They also enjoyed drinks and entrées at the Chop Suey Café on Saturdays. The adjacent Far East Café, owned by Hoie Wing Jung (aka Robert Jung), was a rival. Other Chop Suey restaurants in Little Tokyo included Sam Kow Low Chop Suey Café and Lem's Café.

In front of Yet Quong Low, the Yellow Car streetcars of the Los Angeles Railway P Line ran along East First Street, between Pico Boulevard and Boyle Heights. The streetcars offered access to other Los Angeles neighborhoods.

Gim's best friend at Belmont High School was Yook Toy Jeung. They explored Downtown, Little Tokyo, and Chinatown. Gim took Yook to top of City Hall to see the skyline of Los Angeles.

Moi Chung associated with his fellow clansmen from Kaiping at Wai Sing Meat Company on 700 Spring Street across from China City.

They shared their hopes and dreams, and how they missed their wives and children in China. They wrote letters back home, gossiped, and played games. Moi Chung's best friend was Paul Jung (Dong Foo Jung), a watchmaker.

Antonin Sperl Building

Gim and Moi Chung lived on the second floor of the Antonin Sperl Building, a landmark in Little Tokyo. Antonin Sperl built it in 1882 as a blacksmith shop for horse carriages and wagons. As part of the Little Tokyo Historic District and Preserve America Community, the Antonin Sperl Building is a historically significant building in Little Tokyo according to Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles.

Antonin Sperl was an inventor. He held five patents with the United States Patent Office:

1. Portable Fruit Evaporator, Patent No. 489,168, Patented January 3, 1893.
2. Forging Hammer, Patent No. 500,970, Patented July 4, 1893.
3. Band Brake for Vehicles, Patent No. 769,416, Patented September 6, 1904.
4. Fire Escape, Patent No. 1,488,624, Patented, April 1, 1924.
5. Collapsible Fire Escape, Patent No. 1,537,506, May 12, 1925.

Amelia Street School

Gim attended Amelia Street School at 611 Jackson Street. The students were mostly Japanese, with a very small minority of Chinese and Mexicans.

Central Junior High School

For one semester, Gim attended old Central Junior High School at 457 North Hill Street in Downtown Los Angeles. It had a similar mixture of Japanese, Chinese, Mexicans, and Blacks. He got his diploma on February 4, 1938.

Belmont High School

Gim entered Belmont High School, a three year high school, on February 7, 1938. He received average grades in his classes. Here, he met fellow Chinese from Chinatown. After school and on weekends, Gim worked as a street sweeper, picking up cigarette butts and other trash with a stick. The family was still undergoing financial difficulty. In the apartment, he slept on a "mattress" composed of old newspapers and magazines.

Opened on September 11, 1923, at 1575 West Second Street on Crown Hill, Belmont had a high academic reputation as a model high school in California. Its diverse student body represented the world. There were Blacks and Asians in academic programs, in sports, and in student leadership. The principal was Alfred Longfellow Benshimol, a graduate of Harvard University.

Belmont's annual yearbook was nicknamed "The Campanile" after the high school's prominent tower. During Gim's four years, the yearbook themes were "City of Los Angeles," 1938; "All the World's a Stage," 1939; "The Stories of the Arabian Nights," 1940; and "Pan American Highway," 1941.

Immigrants from Japan, China, Mexico, and other countries attended Foreign Adjustment class to learn English. Gim participated in the Chinese Club, established in 1934 to promote friendship between Chinese and American students; Social Studies teacher Miss Zula Brown was the sponsor. Another student club, Fuji-Kai, promoted better understanding and friendship between USA and Japan; Social Studies teacher Miss Harper was the sponsor.

After six semesters, Gim graduated on January 31, 1941, with his 233 classmates. The 31st Commencement was held on Thursday evening, January 30, 1941, in Tritt Auditorium.



Chinese Club at Belmont High School
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Heyday of Little Tokyo

 Gim Suey Chong, a Chinese, witnessed the tumultuous times of Little Tokyo during its heyday as the business and cultural center of the Japanese community in Southern California. The hostilities between Japan and China were a growing community concern. Tension was rising as the Imperial Japanese Army invaded China.

 On December 7, 1941, Japanese naval bombers attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. President Franklin Roosevelt issued United States Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, exercising his war power authority as Commander-in-Chief to send ethnic Japanese to internment camps. Stores began promoting bargains to unload merchandise. By March 21, 1942, the mandatory exodus to Manzanar in the Owens Valley of California was launched. Little Tokyo was a ghost town.

 Little Tokyo gradually became “Bronzeville” as housing for Blacks, another underclass, from the Deep South. Jazz clubs and fine restaurants flourished for a short period to the end of World War II. Nearby Chinatown and China City underwent major funding-raising initiatives to help war relief efforts.



Street Scene in Little Tokyo in 1942
(Courtesy of National Archives & Records Administration)



China City in 1938
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Curtiss-Wright Technical Institute

During early World War II, Gim Suey Chong studied at Curtiss-Wright Technical Institute of Aeronautics (CWTI) at old Grand Central Air Terminal, established in 1929, in Glendale. He began his training on July 13, 1942.

Founded in 1931, CWTI was “In the Heart of the Aircraft Industry,” specializing exclusively in Aeronautical Engineering and Master

Mechanic Training. It was largest aeronautical engineering and mechanical school in United States. CWTI had an excellent shop training program, in which master mechanic trainees practiced on a variety of obsolete airplanes.

Grand Central Air Terminal was the base for a Lockheed P-38 *Lightning* fighter squadron during World War II. Based there for coastal defense was the 402nd Army Air Forces Base Unit (Fighter) (318th Wing).

Gim undertook 1920 hours of Combined Aircraft and Aircraft Engine curriculum. It included Basic Instruction (160 hours); Aircraft Manufacturing (480 hours); Engine Repair and Test (600 hours); and Aircraft Inspection and Maintenance (680 hours). He got his certificate as master aviation mechanic from the Administrator of Civil Aeronautics on April 23, 1943. (Diploma from Curtiss Wright Technical Institute of Aeronautics at Grand Central Air Terminal.)

While attending CWTI, Gim lived with Moi Chung in a boarding house owned by Hoie Wing Jung of Yet Quong Lew Chop Suey Café. Located at 457 Turner Street in Little Tokyo, the two-story wood-framed boarding house had six rooms for rent at \$10 per month. Supreme Court Justice and California Governor, Earl Warren, was born in this boarding house.



Chinese Club at Curtiss-Wright Technical Institute in Glendale. (Courtesy of Chong Family)

Act III. San Francisco Chinatown

Pan Am

After graduating from Curtiss Wright Technical Institute in 1943 as a qualified aircraft mechanic, Gim was hired by Pan American Airways System as a mechanic's helper. His all-Chinese crew maintained the world famous *China Clipper* flying boat and other seaplanes stationed on Pan Am Treasure Island Station at the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility in San Francisco Bay. The *China Clipper*, a Martin M-130, was the first seaplane to complete the first transpacific flight in 1935. During World War II, it flew between Treasure Island and Pearl Harbor in Honolulu.

Gim was on inactive service duty with the United States Navy, beginning on May 18, 1943. Pan Am was under wartime service contract to the United States Navy. In 1944, the U.S. Navy called Gim to serve at the Pan Am's Honolulu Station at Pearl City in Pearl Harbor. Hawaii was "dull" for Gim. He lived in the barracks, ate in the mess halls, and performed his duties in uniform. During his free time, he went to the beach. Despite being a poor swimmer, he enjoyed floating lazily in the warm tropical waters. One time, unaware that the ocean current had pushed him far from the beach, Gim nearly drowned.

After his tour at the Honolulu Station, Gim returned to work at Mills Field Municipal Airport (now San Francisco International Airport) to maintain seaplanes and passenger planes. Working on a tight schedule, his crew maintained the engines, electrical systems, and mechanical systems to ensure the planes' airworthiness. Gim's crew chief, Lee Leong, remembered Gim as a hard worker—an introvert who rarely mingled with his fellow crewmembers. *"Jim Chong, I have always called him that, was one of best members of my crew. He did his job always to the best of his ability; I remember that he seldom questioned his assignments. He did the job regardless of whether it is a desirable or not so desirable one. Another thing I remembered well was his positive attitude. He got along well with all his co-workers."*

From 1943 to 1950, Gim lived primarily in San Francisco Chinatown, in the apartments of 847 Clay Street. The apartment building is now known as "San Francisco Lodge Chinese American Citizens Alliance

Building 1953.” During World War II, San Francisco Chinatown was an enclave of shops, bazaars, and restaurants. The Chinese nightclubs, including “Forbidden City,” were at their zenith of business success. With fellow crewmembers, Gim carpooled from Chinatown to Treasure Island and later to Mills Field for his job.

As an Asian during a war against the Japanese, Gim experienced his share of prejudice. During a drive back from an outing in the San Francisco Bay area, Gim’s friend was at the wheel; Gim and his other friends were lying down asleep in the car. Suddenly two men in another car forced Gim’s friend to pull over to the side of the highway. The two strangers shouted curses as they approached their car. They were expecting an easy fight against a single little “Japanese.” However, the disturbance awoke Gim and his friends, and they all exited the car. Unexpectedly, the two strangers were confronted with six Asians, including an exceptionally large one—George Fong had played fullback at University of California, Berkeley. The two men quickly walked back to their car and drove off. Years later, Gim recalled this incident with laughter.

Gim was discharged from military service on December 7, 1945.



The crew in front of *China Clipper* on Treasure Island Station in 1943. (Courtesy of Chong Family)



**Gim Suey Chong in uniform with Pan American Airways System at Honolulu Station in 1944.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Kubla Khan

At end of World War II, during The Golden Age of Chinese Nightclubs, Gim invested his savings with nightclub owner Eddie Pond and others. From 1946 to 1950, Gim Suey Chong was a partner at the famous Eddie Pond's Kubla Khan Theater Restaurant.

Eddie Pond—under the name of Kwan Pun—had arrived at the Port of Seattle on July 16, 1923, aboard S.S. *Jefferson* from the Port of Hong Kong. Pond was an astute entrepreneur. Under Pond and Associates in San Francisco Chinatown, Eddie Pond was involved in real estate as a broker and in insurance as a broker. In the early mornings, Eddie Pond also operated a breakfast club on Grant Avenue and later on Kearny Street. He was a natural lover of the theater and of the arts. Prior to Kubla Khan, Eddie Pond opened his first nightclub, the Dragon's Lair, in Chinatown.

Eddie Pond was married four times, to Goldina Lee, Lonnie Fong, Adele Wong, and Barbara Yung. He had three children with his first wife, Goldina Lee: Adelina, Gilbert, and Roger. They were born in San Francisco. His subsequent wives were performers at the Kubla Khan.

The Kubla Khan was a Chinese theater restaurant and nightclub with bar, known for its band entertainment and stage performances.

Located at 414 Grant Avenue, next to the famous San Francisco Chinatown Gateway, it was a gathering place for dinner, dance, and show. Patrons had the choice of either American or Chinese dishes and were entertained by an all-Chinese revue, with a mixture of vaudeville and burlesque in the theater.

Kubla Khan was named for a classic poem: "Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment," written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Eddie Pond took the title from the Mongol and Chinese emperor Kublai Khan of the Yuan dynasty.

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.*

Eddie Pond's Kubla Khan was promoted as "San Francisco's Most Exciting Chinese Theatre Restaurant." Eddie Pond was a fine showman. He greeted Hollywood and Broadway stars and other celebrities to his exotic palace of splendor. Ivan Paul, Night Club Editor of *San Francisco Examiner*, wrote, "No need to travel to China for the spell...the mystery...of the Orient. Ankle Chinatown way to the KUBLA KHAN...there it is."

The Kubla Khan competed with the internationally famous and popular "Forbidden City" nightclub and cabaret by Charlie Low. "Forbidden City" was featured in the hit *Flower Drum Song* novel (1957), Broadway play (1958), and Hollywood movie (1961).

Eddie Pond was colorful personality and enigmatic individual. At times, he emceed and performed on the stage. Three times every evening, Eddie Pond presented a one-hour program with a Latin theme. The program had nine acts:

1. Street Scene
2. Chinese Sleeve Dance
3. Chinese Lullaby
4. Coolie Dance
5. Sing Lee Sings – Chinese Acrobats
6. Sing Song Girls
7. China's Dancing Sweethearts

8. Oriental Interlude

9. Chinacong

In the program, Jadin and Li Sun gracefully danced to the Latin band of Bill Oetke and his Rumberos. Sing Lee Troupe performed their circus acrobatics. May Lee sang songs. Walton Biggerstaff was the producer and choreographer. At times, Eddie Pond danced in the acts and played instruments with the Latin band. He was jovially known as "The Chinese Demon of the Maracas."

Exotic dancer Noel Toy performed her strip tease acts nightly at the Kubla Khan, seductively dazzling audiences with her famous fan dance and bubble dance. She was billed the "Chinese Sally Rand," after a well known burlesque dancer.

Nora Wong, now Elly Chui of Honolulu, related her experience as singer, dancer, and emcee at the Kubla Khan (from "Late Night in the Lion's Den in "Gastronomic" by Harley Spiller):

Later on, Nora worked at Kubla Khan, which she described as "a huge place on the Gateway of Chinatown, still there, a three-story building. I was billed as a Latin-American-Chinese-Vocalist." As she's purely Chinese-American, we joked that they must have thought her birth in Arizona qualified as Latin. She did sing some songs in Spanish, like "Besame Mucho" ("Kiss me a lot."). "It's still there and was beautiful," she whispered.

At the Kubla Khan, the dining room and dance floor were in front of the stage on the second floor, with a balcony on the third floor. A cigarette girl sold various brands of cigarettes and cigars. A lady photographer offered souvenir photos to patrons. Cocktail waitresses served drinks. The bartender was busy mixing house cocktails at the bar near the cocktail lounge. In the back stage, the Kubla Khan beauties enjoyed the well-appointed dressing rooms.

Frank Yee, a patron as well as friend of Eddie Pond, recalled his times at the Kubla Khan:

During my bachelor days, with my buddies, I was hopping among the Chinese nightclubs in San Francisco Chinatown. Eddie Pond's

Kubla Khan was a fine nightclub at the same class as Charlie Low's Forbidden City and Andy Wong's Chinese Sky Room. We brought our dates to watch the entertaining Broadway-style shows. We had group parties in the cocktail lounge at the Kubla Khan. Eddie Pond was a very gracious host.

Gim worked quietly as a waiter at the Kubla Khan. He gradually gained confidence and was known as a sharp dresser. Gim was photogenic as he gazed away from camera. He was adapting well to the American way of life.

The Chinese nightclub business was in a slow and gradual decline after World War II. Gim eventually sold his share of the Kubla Khan and returned to Los Angeles to live again with his father.



Old Kubla Khan
at the Gateway of
San Francisco
Chinatown.
(Courtesy of
Chong Family)



Eddie Ponds' Theatre Restaurant
souvenir photo holder.
(Courtesy of Trina Robbins)



**"A Night in Chinatown" at
Kubla Khan.
(Courtesy of Trina Robbins)**



**Jim Suey Chong with fellow waiters at Kubla Khan.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Act IV: City of Angels

Return to Los Angeles

Jim Suey Chong returned to Los Angeles to live in New Chinatown in 1950. From 1950 to 1955, he and his father, Moi Chung, lived in a room of the College Hotel on Broadway, above the famous Little Joe's Italian American Restaurant. The College Hotel had a big wooden staircase; the apartments had communal bathroom at the end of the long hallway. Before becoming New Chinatown, the neighborhood had been an enclave of Italian immigrants. The New Chinatown business community consisted of grocery stores, laundries, and restaurants. Moi Chung worked casual jobs at restaurants in the area.



West Gate of Central Plaza in New Chinatown.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Lockheed

The Cold War period was known as The Golden Age of Aviation in the San Fernando Valley. Jim worked for the Lockheed-California Company as a quality assurance inspector, in a vast industrial complex in

Burbank. He was a member of the team that produced U.S. Navy Anti Submarine Warfare (ASW) planes like the P-2 *Neptune*, P-3 *Orion*, and S-3 *Viking*. He also worked on F-104 *Starfighter*, C-5 *Galaxy*, and L-1011 *TriStar*.

Gim worked diligently for Lockheed from December 4, 1950, until his early retirement in 1978, due to kidney disease. He received many commendations for his excellent work at Lockheed. He was a loyal company man in faithful service for 28 years.



**Gim Suey Chong with co-worker
with P-3 *Orion* in Burbank
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Far East Cafe

On weekends, from 1950 to 1974, Gim Suey Chong worked as a waiter at the old Far East Café (aka En Tow Low) at the landmark Far East Building at 347 East First Street in the heart of Little Tokyo. This chop suey joint was known in the Nikkei community for its China-Meshi cuisine. Its principle owner, Look Mar, was partners with three cousins, Goey Yee Chong, Oak Hoey Chang, and Kwok Hoey Jeong. Gim enjoyed working for his Hoyping cousins.

Every Saturday and Sunday, Gim left early in the morning and headed late in the evening for home (11 a.m. to 9 p.m. schedule). Toyo Miyatake, the prominent photographer of the Manzanar internment camp,

was a regular lunch and dinner patron of Far East Café, along with his sons and grandsons. Miyatake's photography studio was on 318 East First Street.

During breaks at the Far East Café, Gim joked with his fellow waiters and busboys, and played games. Among his peers, Gim was known as a nice guy with a sense of humor, and intelligence. Dr. Andrew Chong, a busboy at the time, had fond memories of Gim. He recalled Gim as a humble man who seldom talked about himself, typical of a Chinese man of his generation. Gim was noted for his musculature and strength—he bested everyone in arm wrestling at the restaurant. He also was known for trying to please his customers. One hot summer day, a customer demanded sweet watermelon for dessert. Gim promised that he would serve the sweetest watermelon the customer had ever tasted. So Gim went to the kitchen, poured sugar over a plate of watermelon, and brought it to the customer. He was also helpful to his friends in getting them jobs at Lockheed.

The Far East Café was a special gathering place for the Nikkei community. They gathered for weddings, birthdays, graduations, parties, and funerals. Bill Watanabe, Executive Director of Little Tokyo Service Center, felt strongly that the Far East Café had a major impact on the Nikkei community, who had returned to Los Angeles from the internment camps in despair at the end of World War II.

Bill Watanabe wrote:

When World War II broke out, all of the Japanese along the west coast of the United States were forcibly removed and incarcerated in camps in the interior portions of the country. Thus, from 1942–1945, Little Tokyo was devoid of any Japanese or Japanese American presence, and the area was occupied by others who came to Los Angeles from the South and Midwest and were in need of housing.

After World War II ended in 1945, many Japanese Americans sought to return to Southern California but they found there were few places for them to live. A number of families were housed temporarily at the Koyasan Temple on First Street in Little Tokyo – including members of my own family.

According to some folks who recall those days, after spending

years in the camps and losing most if not all of their possessions, they had little spending money. They would go to the Far East Cafe across the street from the Koyasan Temple and the Chinese owners of the Cafe, who were familiar with many of these returnees, allowed them to eat "on credit", asking to be paid when they were able to do so. It could truth fully be said that this kind of goodwill helped to make the Far East, along with its famous cheap and tasty menu, the most popular and well-known restaurant in the entire Japanese American community.



"Far East Building" sign.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)



Chop Suey Café Today.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

With the help of his future mother-in-law, Tuey Hai Quan, Gim courted Miss Seen Hoy Tong of Santa Barbara, California. His first dinner date with Seen and her family was at the old Far East Café in 1954. They sat at Booth #2. Since he was also a waiter, Gim actually served dinner to Seen and her family.

Gim's bachelorhood ended on January 14, 1955, when he married Seen Hoy Tong in Los Angeles. Paul Jung, Gim's relative, served as witness. Superior Court Judge George Dockweiler performed the ceremony. On March 5, 1955, Gim and Seen purchased a two-bedroom bungalow home in Elysian Valley, a working class neighborhood by the Los Angeles River near Downtown. Gim also bought his first car, a green 1955 Ford sedan.

Gim and Seen raised two sons: Raymond was born in early 1956. Michael was born later the same year. Dr. Julius Sue, M.D., delivered both

boys at the old French Hospital in New Chinatown. He also was their family physician. The boys saw Dr. Julius Sue at his medical office on Broadway for assorted childhood illnesses and vaccination shots. They remember the strong odor of alcohol in the examination room.

Family Life

Gim proudly watched the boys grow to young men. Working at Lockheed and Far East Café, he hustled for money to provide a better life for the family. He worked the swing shift at Lockheed to earn a little extra needed money. Gim was also supporting his mother who lived in China and his retired father who was living with his family. Working his two jobs, Gim was rarely home during family meals. His paternal relationship with his sons suffered as a consequence. Nevertheless, he was always concerned about the welfare of his active sons and was very proud of their eventual educational achievements.

Yook Toy Jeung, a cook at the Far East Café, fondly recalled: *"Gim was a hard worker. He took care of his family. He was an honest person."*

On December 8, 1964, Gim and Seen bought an old house adjacent to their own, and built a four-unit apartment building as a real estate investment.



Portrait of Chong Family in 1961.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Seen worked as an electronics assembler for General Instruments Company of Hawthorne in the South Bay. Many of her co-workers were Issei or Nisei women, so Seen picked up a slight Japanese accent. She and her co-workers became lifelong friends, especially Clara Higuchi.

The Chong family exchanged visits with their relatives, the Tong family, near State Street in Santa Barbara. Sun Yoke Tong, Gim's father-in-law, operated the Sun Tong Laundry. The boys spent several summers enjoying the beaches of Santa Barbara with their uncle and aunts. They also visited the family of Fong Suey Chong, Gim's sister, in the Richmond District of San Francisco, where the boys played with their Mar cousins.

With the help of California Congressman George Edward Brown, Jr., Gim was reunited with Cun Chuen Wong, his mother, on February 14, 1966, at Los Angeles International Airport after a long separation of 34 years. Seen and her co-workers at General Instruments won a major prize in the Irish Sweepstake. With her share of the money, Gim and Seen were able to purchase a bungalow nearby for his father and mother. Still, Gim worked steadily at the two jobs. He supplemented the meager Social Security check that Moi Chung, his father, was receiving.

For years after his mother immigrated, Gim wrote a letter of gratitude each Christmas on behalf of his father and sent it with a box of Chinese tea to Congressman Brown. Despite living in the United States for many years, his father's English was very poor, so Gim had to write the letters. But by writing these letters, he was actually expressing his own gratitude to the Congressman—especially since Gim was unable to acknowledge his relationship to his father and mother to those outside close friends and family.

He was a "paper son," and his relationship to his real parents was unknown even to those in regular contact with the family. Many years later after Gim's passing, Dr. Julius Sue, the family physician, remarked to one of Gim's sons that he remembered Gim being very caring for the old man (Moi Chung) but that he was puzzled by his devotion.



**Gim Suey Chong with Tong Family.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Deaths

The health of Moi Chung and Cun Chuen, Gim's parents, gradually declined. With great reluctance and deep anguish, Gim eventually placed them in a nursing home in Los Angeles. Moi Chung died on August 3, 1976. Cun Chuen Wong died on October 24, 1977. Both died at the French Hospital with Dr. Julius Sue in attendance. Gim sadly buried them at the Chinese Cemetery in East Los Angeles among other Chinese sojourners.



**Graves of Cun Chuen Wong and Moi Chung in the Chinese Cemetery of East Los Angeles.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

After a short life of 57 years, Gim Suey Chong died on December 2, 1979, at Saint Vincent's Hospital in Los Angeles. He died of complications from a kidney transplant rejection. Dr. Roger Boken was the attending physician. Jeung (paternal) and Yee (maternal) relatives, and close friends from Far East Café and Lockheed deeply mourned his death. They

attended his funeral on December 7, 1979. Gim is buried in Gardens of Honor at Forest Lawn Memorial Park cemetery in Glendale.

His grave marker is inscribed simply:

Gim Suey Chong.

1922-1979.

Beloved Husband and Father.

He lives with us in memory

And will for evermore.



**Grave of Gim Suey Chong in Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Epilogue

Raymond Douglas Chong, the eldest son of Gim Suey Chong, reflects on the life of his father:

Gim Suey Chong faced constant hardships and harsh challenges in Gum Saan. As a young sojourner, he embarked on an epic journey across the Pacific Ocean and the North American continent to arrive in Boston in 1932. He lived in poverty under adverse conditions in Central Square of Cambridge and in Little Tokyo of Los Angeles. He experienced the tumultuous periods of the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War in America.

Gim witnessed the "The Heydays of Little Tokyo," "The Golden Age of Chinese Nightclubs," "The Golden Age of Aviation in the San Fernando Valley," and "The Golden Years of New Chinatown." He was involved with the old Yet Quong Low (Nikko Low) Chop Suey Café in Little Tokyo, historic Eddie Pond's Kubla Khan Theater Restaurant in San Francisco Chinatown, and Far East

Café in Little Tokyo. He worked for the venerable Pan American Airways System on Treasure Island, with its China Clipper, and the historic Lockheed-California Company in Burbank. He lived and socialized in New Chinatown of Los Angeles.

For centuries, his ancestors, peasant farmers, toiled in the fields of the Pearl River Delta. As a sojourner, he never returned to Yung Lew Gong Village in Hoyping. However, he left a strong legacy for future generations of his descendants in Gum Saan through his sons, Raymond and Michael. Gim was our humble “Quiet Man” in our family. He firmly believed in the American dream. Gim Suey Chong lived an extraordinary life from Hoyping to Gum Saan.



Gim Suey and Seen Hoy Chong.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

About the authors:



Raymond Chong

Raymond Chong is a Deputy Director for the city of Houston, Texas; he is in charge of the transportation system infrastructure of America's fourth largest city. Raymond was raised in a barrio near New Chinatown in Los Angeles. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Southern California and a master's degree from San Jose State University. He is a licensed civil engineer and traffic engineer. Raymond resides in Sugar Land, Texas, with his wife Mabel and their son Kenji.