Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown, Taken by James Wong Howe, 1944

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Finding Aid Author(s):
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Collection Summary
Collection Title: Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown, Taken by James Wong Howe
Date: 1944
Collection Number: BANC PIC 1996.014--PIC
Photographer: James Wong Howe
Extent: 29 b&w photographic prints, 21 x 26 cm. or smaller.29 digital objects
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Digital representations of selected original pictorial materials are available in the list of materials below. Digital image files were prepared from selected Library originals by the Library Photographic Service. Library originals were copied onto 35mm color transparency film; the film was scanned and transferred to Kodak Photo CD (by Custom Process); and the Photo CD files were color-corrected and saved in JFIF (JPEG) format for use as viewing files.
Acquisition Information
Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown, Taken by James Wong Howe, 1944

The Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown collection was purchased in 1996.

Biography
James Wong Howe was born Wong Tung Jim on August 28, 1899 in Kwantung (Canton), China. He moved to the United States at age 5. After pursuing a career as a professional boxer in the Northwest, Howe moved to Los Angeles and became a delivery boy for a commercial photographer. In 1917 Howe entered the Hollywood film industry and soon became an assistant cameraman, working with such notable directors as Cecil B. DeMille. In 1922 he became a director of photography and quickly established a reputation as an inventive and meticulous craftsman. Initially known as James Howe, his Chinese name was added by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in hopes that a more exotic-sounding name appearing on film credits would enhance publicity for both Howe and the studio. In industry circles, Howe acquired the nickname of Low Key Hoe for his distinctive application of low-key photography. Howe also pioneered the use of deep focus and the hand-held camera. Howe won Academy Awards for his cinematography for The Rose Tattoo (1955) and Hud (1963). Throughout his career Howe was also active as a still photographer. James Wong Howe died in 1976.

Other notable films featuring the cinematography of Howe include Peter Pan (1924), The Thin Man (1934), Mark of the Vampire (1935), The Prisoner of Zenda (1937), They Made Me a Criminal (1939), Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942), Body and Soul (1947), He Ran All the Way (1951), Come Back Little Sheba (1953), Picnic (1956), The Sweet Smell of Success (1957), The Old Man and the Sea (1958), and Funny Lady (1975).

Scope and Content
The Photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown collection contains 29 photographs taken by James Wong Howe during World War Two documenting the assimilation of Chinese Americans. The collection is only a portion of a larger group of photographs commissioned by Look magazine in 1944 "to get behind the tourist front" of San Francisco's Chinatown. The collection features various workers, children, soldiers, and youth in an attempt to illustrate the degree to which Chinese Americans had been assimilated into mainstream American culture and were thus supportive of the United States' war efforts. Included among the photographs are scenes of Chinese American home life, schooling, recreation, dining, and work places such as a newspaper press, child care center, telephone switchboard, construction site, pawn broker, and various offices.

The original Look article, Chinatown, San Francisco (issued December 26, 1944; pp. 22-27), explains the magazine's choice of Howe as the photographer for the article, gives a brief history of Chinese Americans, makes a claim for the Chinese American allegiance to the United States' war cause, and presents a series of 18 fully captioned photographs taken in Chinatown. Though most of the prints in the collection are uncaptioned with the exception of classificatory information, some include hand-written versions of the captions found in the Look article. The series arrangement of the present finding aid is generally based on the subject headings found on the print versos. Some information contained in the bracketed captions, though not included on the versos, is taken directly from the Look captions. Captions in the container listing marked with an asterisk (*) were included in the original Look article.

In addition to the captions and subject classifications, the print versos also contain various numberings and a hand stamp.

Series 1: Chinese Americans -- Working. No. 1-2


Series 2: Chinese Americans -- Women. No. 3-8

[Telephone operator.] BANC PIC 1996.014:03--PIC  ark:/13030/tf9s2011tv

[Typist.] BANC PIC 1996.014:04--PIC  ark:/13030/tf0s2005nz

[Woman at desk.] BANC PIC 1996.014:05--PIC  ark:/13030/tf4w1008rv

[Nurse and woman weighing infant.] BANC PIC 1996.014:06--PIC  ark:/13030/tf1w10060k

[Construction worker in locker room.] BANC PIC 1996.014:07--PIC  ark:/13030/tf3m3nb44n

[Construction workers on site.] BANC PIC 1996.014:08--PIC  ark:/13030/tf987010qj

Series 3: Chinese Americans -- Men. No. 9-13
Series 3: Chinese Americans -- Men. No. 9-13

[Man leaving office of the Consulate General of the Republic of China.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:09--PIC ark:/13030/tf2p3005th

Chinatown's American Legion, Cathay Post, No. 384, has veterans of both this & the last wars. Present membership of 450 includes holder of the Croix de Guerre & the Distinguished Service Cross. After war, enrollment is expected to pass 1,500.*
BANC PIC 1996.014:10--PIC ark:/13030/tf7d5nb6gg

Pin-ups provoke the same soldier emotions in any language. Note how girls' legs have been elongated.* BANC PIC 1996.014:11--PIC ark:/13030/tf9489p3k5

[Fong Fong Hoo, owner of ice cream parlor, decorating cake. Cf. No. 26.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:12--PIC ark:/13030/tf6c6008g2

[Artist.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:13--PIC ark:/13030/tf4p30081p

Series 4: Chinese Americans -- Children. No. 14-22

Girl Scouts have two troops in Chinatown. Ruby Kimlau, daughter of American Legion Post Commander.* BANC PIC 1996.014:14--PIC ark:/13030/tf3s2007wg

[Girl and teacher at blackboard.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:15--PIC ark:/13030/tf9f59p4d1

[Teacher with pupils at blackboard.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:16--PIC ark:/13030/tf7m3nb5mm

[Pupils writing at desks.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:17--PIC ark:/13030/tf8m3nb6zk

[Pupils writing at desks.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:18--PIC ark:/13030/tf5199p18n

[Pupils writing at desks.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:19--PIC ark:/13030/tf429007fg

[Boys making kites.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:20--PIC ark:/13030/tf3c600792

[Boys with basketball. Clay Street playground.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:21--PIC ark:/13030/tf3q2nb41r

[Beverly Chang, four years old, with ice cream cone.]* BANC PIC 1996.014:22--PIC ark:/13030/tf2f59p0bw

Series 5: Chinese Americans -- Miscellaneous. No. 23-29

[Man and woman on sofa.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:23--PIC ark:/13030/tf6t1nb5tq

[Woman with infant at child care center.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:24--PIC ark:/13030/tf300006sr

Sunday afternoon at the Shee Wong Chan's is much like that of any other American family. Grandpa Chan is well established behind the Sunday papers, as are his grandchildren.* BANC PIC 1996.014:25--PIC ark:/13030/tfoh4nb1h9

Like other American boys they patronize ice cream parlors. Owner is Fong Fong Hoo.* BANC PIC 1996.014:26--PIC ark:/13030/tf9b69p47s

[Party at dining table.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:27--PIC ark:/13030/tf8d5nb7bf

[Unidentified hand with chopsticks.]
BANC PIC 1996.014:28--PIC ark:/13030/tf8c60109p

Customer at pawnbroker's shop remains hidden, slips camera through window for the Chinese consider it a disgrace to pawn anything.* BANC PIC 1996.014:29--PIC ark:/13030/tf9v19p4mr

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