

# The AACCP Newsletter

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## An Interview With Charlie Chin

### On His One Man Performance "*Chinatown is Burning*" and Other Issues Related to the 1906 Earthquake and the Asian American Community

Charlie Chin will be performing "*Chinatown is Burning*" at San Mateo's 6th Annual Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration on May 20th and at the Oakland Museum on Sun. May 7 at 3pm. "*Chinatown is Burning*" is about the experiences of Hugh Liang, a 1906 Chinese American Earthquake survivor.

**Please describe for the readers of this interview a little bit about your performance.**

The presentation is in a Chautauqua format. This is used by presenters who do "history alive." The idea comes from a popular form of educational entertainment in the north east and mid-west of the United States from 1890 until about 1930/1940. A figure from history is researched by the presenter and then a presentation takes place. (For instance, George Washington or Caesar Augustus) The Chautauqua Presentation has the following format.

- A. The character in costume talks to the audience about his/her life and the events that took place.
- B. The character answers questions from the audience about the events or personal experiences.
- C. The presenter steps out of Character and speaks about the historical person objectively.

This means there is a monologue, followed by questions from the audience about anything that might think of (this is the fun part for me as I must be prepared to answer any question based on my research and memorization of the person and their times). And lastly, the presenter speaks about things out of Character that the character could not have answered, like when did you die? What happened after you died? Where are your descendants? and so forth.

**Tell us about the creation of this performance, such as – Who came up with the idea? How did you hear of the real life story of Hugh Liang? Why Hugh Liang - were there other**

**choices? The question and answer section was pretty amazing - you were able to answers the questions from the audience all in character. You really gave the impression that you were Hugh Liang. Were you channeling him :) ? What did you do to prepare for this performance? How long did this take?**

At the Chinese Historical Society of America we discussed several possible choices but chose Hugh Liang because he was a Chinese American, he was 15 years old and so was old enough to accurately remember what happened, and because he was in Vaudeville for 12 years, I could sing a song at the end.

There are three sections of research for the presentation. One, all and any materials extant must be found and placed in order and all facts known about the character must be memorized. Two, the "voice" of the character must be found and practiced, ( his cadence, his accent or lack of one, his attitude, etc.) Three, all facts known about the event must be memorized. (books, films, TV documentaries, articles, etc.) Reviewing 3 by 5 inch flash cards with questions on one side and the answer on the otherside while on the train to and from San Francisco is the main technique I use.

**Did you ever get to meet Hugh Liang? Did you talk with his friends and family and other people that knew him?**

I never met Hugh Liang, but I have talked to some people who met him and talked with him before he died in 1984 at the age of 93. He wrote a memoir for a grandniece and I found a copy of the manuscript in the archives of CHSA. He and his group, the Chung Wah Quartet were famous and there was some mention and reviews about them.

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## The Immigration Issue

by Leonard D. Chan

Guess the date and origin of, and the group that fits the underlines in the following passage –

*"To understand and appreciate how inadequate are the so-called \_\_\_\_\_ exclusion laws to preventing the entry of \_\_\_\_\_ laborers to the United States it is only necessary to examine and analyze the statistics on this subject furnished in Tables 1 to 8 (pp. 142-148). All possible under existing law is done to prevent the entry of \_\_\_\_\_ not entitled to be in the United States; but despite these efforts \_\_\_\_\_ laborers are constantly gaining admission...Under these circumstances it can readily be seen that the enforcement of the law becomes a very difficult matter."*

When I started my research for this month's articles, I had ever intent of writing a piece on the San Francisco 1906 Earthquake and Fire. Most of what I read was already being covered in the news, in special documentaries, and in various other media on the subject. There is a lot of material that you can find on the Earthquake. Anybody with some historical curiosity can spend much time engrossed in all the interesting facets of this major event. I will highlight just a few issues, its connection to today's news, and list some resources for your further research.

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## Give Us Your Feedback

Please feel free to send us your reviews, comments, and book suggestions. You can contact us at -  
aacpinc@asianamericanbooks.com

### Up Coming Events

Here are some events that AACCP will soon be attending. Invite us to your events.

Date/Time	Event	Location
April 21-22	Asian Educator Alliance	Lick-Wilmerding HS San Francisco, CA
May 20	6th Annual Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration	Central Park Community Center San Mateo, CA
June 21-24	JACL National Convention	Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa Chandler, AZ
Other Event of Interest that AACCP May Not Attend		
April 22-23	Annual Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival and Parade	San Francisco, CA
April 28-30	37th Annual Manzanar Pilgrimage	Manzanar National Historic Site Independence, CA
April 28-29	NAAPAE 28th Annual Conference	Washington, DC
April 30	Nikkei Matsuri Arts and Crafts Festival	San Jose, CA
April 30	San Jose's Opera in the Park Zheng Cao, Ding Gao, and friends	386 Educational Park Drive San Jose, CA
2006	100th Anniversary of Japantown Events will take place throughout the year	Japantown San Francisco, CA

### An Interview With Charlie Chin

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**Your performance and question and answer section also shows that you are very well versed with the history of the 1906 earthquake and how it relates to Chinatown. When I started out researching for this month's newsletter article, I wanted to find little know stories about 1906 or something of significance that related the 1906 earthquake to the Asian American communities of the San Francisco Bay Area. Can you tell us anything that you learned in your research that you found of great interest or significance (basically help me with my research here :)?**

The thing I found of interest to me was that there was an Afro-American community right next to Chinatown. There are period photos of people watching the fire coming up Clay Street towards Powell (Street) and there are nicely dressed middle-class Black

## Editor's Message

Hello Everyone,

My apologies for sending this so late. We had a strange convergence of the tax deadline, Easter, the newsletter deadline, 1906 Earthquake 100th anniversary, and preparations for our May Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration.

### Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration

Yes, it's back. After a layoff of a number of years, AACCP and a number of San Mateo area non-profit organizations are holding an Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration. It will be the 6th and we hope you'll join us for this free and entertaining event. Charlie Chin will be our featured performer. We'll be posting an announcement page containing all the detail on our website shortly. So please check back frequently.

### Thanks

Special thanks this month goes to Charlie Chin for his cooperation in doing the interview with us, Bill Greene for giving me an idea for a different angle on the Earthquake story, Marisa Louie for some more ideas, and my family for helping me with my research.

That's all the time I have.

Bye.

Leonard Chan  
**Executive Editor**

people standing in the street. Apparently many of them went to Oakland. There is a section of the Oakland museum's exhibition about this small Black community but I haven't seen it yet.

**This is kind of interesting because there was a Japanese community in close proximity too. I also have a book with a map that shows a Latin Quarter north of Chinatown. Tell us a little bit about the establishing and reestablishing of Chinatown and the Japanese community too.**

If we talk about the communities around Chinatown, we have to keep in mind that Chinatown sits on what was the founding site of San Francisco. There is a historical plaque on a building on Grant Ave between Clay and Washington streets marking the site of the first building in San Francisco. The Bay edge and the docks were only a few blocks down from Portsmouth Square and Chinatown. In fact the square is named after the ship, U.S. War Sloop

Portsmouth that Captain John B. Montgomery (the Montgomery that the street is named for) sailed into Yerba Buena (San Francisco Bay). The square is where he raised the American Flag to claim the area for the United States in 1846. Landfill was used later to extend the shoreline out after the Gold Rush in 1849-1850 (still a problem if there is an earthquake).

This being the case, it is a natural course of events that the rich move up the hill to the more spacious, less crowded, better view, section and the poor are stuck down the hill at the center of town where it's crowded, dirty, and literally smells bad.

The Japanese community was always represented, but small in the Bay Area. Japanese were primarily farmers and so most were further down the Peninsula and towards San Jose. There has never been a large-scale immigration out of Japan for any reason, because of the 260 years of self imposed isolation and then modernization during the Meiji Restoration, and its emergence as an Asian Industrial Power following the 1905 Russian/Japanese War.

There is a listing of 93 Japanese children that were forced to change schools, by the SF Board of Education, to the former Chinese school that was named the Oriental School in 1906. Even if every child was an only child, that would mean only 93 Japanese families, and a larger number of Japanese single men laborers. The 1910 census lists 4,700 Japanese in San Francisco at the time.

As to why the city left Chinatown to rebuild on the original site, my research shows that when both Seattle and Los Angeles offered to take in the Chinese community this made city leaders suspicious of their motives. So they reviewed how much revenue, (legal and bribes etc.) that Chinatown brought in (huge). Chinatown leaders like Oak Tin Eli raised money (millions in Hong Kong) to rebuild right away. White landlords complained that the Chinese paid the high rents they charged and always paid on time and they didn't want that kind of income to move away. Most Chinatown businesses were ready to rebuild out of their own pockets.

**I know the historian Gladys Hansen was working on a more comprehensive list of the individuals that perished in the 1906 earthquake and fire. Do you know if she's been able to come up with any rough figure for the number of Asian Americans that may have died in the earthquake and fire? What's your rough guess?**

Gladys Hansen's work I only know of from a distance. She has put the number of city deaths at around 3000. But I have no idea how many Chinese were killed. Most of the accounts of the Chinese population vary widely, from 20,000 to 60,000 in

## **The Immigrant Issue**

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The issues with the Earthquake that seem relevant and relating to today's news are issues of immigration and discrimination. With the debates over immigration law in congress and the stories of the post Katrina hurricane effect on the racially marginalized in New Orleans, anyone that has done some research on the San Francisco Earthquake will see a connection between these topics.

My revelation to this connection started when I began to research the subject of Chinese to US immigration following the Earthquake. Many books and media stories on the Earthquake

Chinatown but nobody really knows. One guy at that time came to a figure by taking the number of beds and cots found in Chinatown during health inspections and doubling the number, figuring that two men slept in the same bed during 24 hours, one at night, one during the day. Nobody has come up with a hard figure for the population or the number of deaths in C-town community.

**In my studies on the earthquake, I found the Asian discrimination stories kind of sad. Things such as how few rescue attempts were made to help Asian Americans buried in the rubble and left to burn in the fires. Of how the San Francisco Chinese refugees were moved from place to place because no one wanted them near by and how some ended up in the coldest and wettest parts of the city. Of how there were major arguments and fights over where to rebuild Chinatown. Of how the ruined Chinatown was pillaged while other parts of the city were being protected by "shoot to kill orders." Of how Japanese nationals came in relief and for scientific research, and were beaten up and had stones thrown at them for being in the wrong parts of town. Of how there was even a need to partition the city into a Chinatown and Japantown. It's strange how we honor the 100th anniversary for communities such as San Francisco's Japantown that were basically ghettos built as a result of turn of the century discrimination. Should we be celebrating or memorializing this anniversary?**

Well, the question of whether we should be celebrating or memorializing the 1906 quake and fire is something the city has been turning over also. Some people say because it was a disaster we should have somber remembrances. Others see the rebuilding of the city as a thing to celebrate. I don't know. You can take your pick. Thousands died and 500 blocks were burned but the city was rebuilt in three years and went on to be a successful and famous city.

**Do you have any favorite books and or videos on the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire that you can recommend to our readers?**

I don't have any special books or films that I like, as I have to research all of them. I feel that the city has gotten a lot of information and that people will be ready to put it all behind them after this April is over. Which is why so many agencies are trying to impress people with earthquake awareness now. They know people will move on and forget about it by summer.

have some mention of the burning of San Francisco City Hall records and the significance it had on the Chinese American community in America.

The story goes that when the records were destroyed, Chinese used the opportunity to claim that they were born in San Francisco and were thus United States citizens when they were really not. At that time Chinese were not allowed to become citizens through the naturalization process, so faking ones birth records in this way was the only recourse for China born Chinese to gain US citizenship. Because of the restrictive Chinese immigration laws, the only Chinese that were being allowed into the United States

were merchants (business people), students, teachers, returning laborers that had special return permits, citizens, and spouses and children of citizens. The burning of the birth records thus supposedly resulted in a flood of new immigrants claiming to be spouses and children of Chinese citizens.

To my amazement, one of my contacts at the National Archives told me that he thought this bit of history was being overstated and that he saw no evidence to support a massive influx of Chinese after the Earthquake. He suggested that I look at the statistical data found in the annual reports of the Commissioner-General of Immigration to the Secretary of Commerce and Labor written in the years before and after the Earthquake.

In my limited research, here's what I was able to find (see table below). Although the number of Chinese that were being admitted into the United States increased after 1906, the level was still below the figure for 1898. In the 10 years following the earthquake there was no massive increase in the number of Chinese admitted into the United States. From the years 1907 to 1916 the total admitted was 52,994. When compared to the millions of Europeans that were allowed to immigrate to the United States during this same period, this figure was a drop in the bucket.

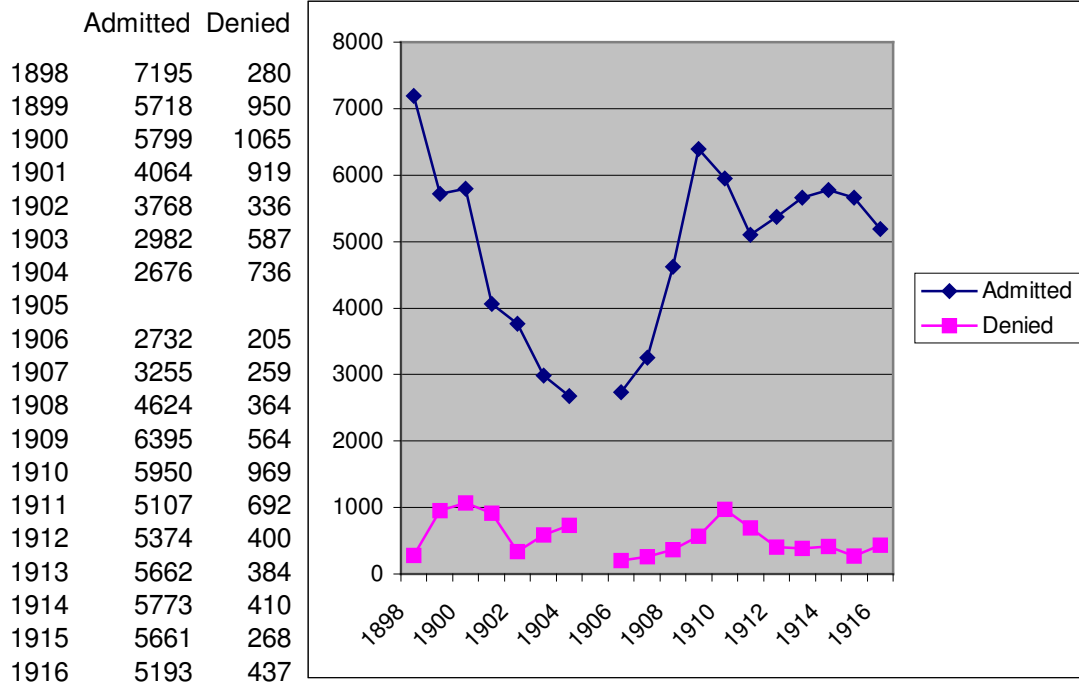
As you may have guessed by now, the quote at the beginning of this article was from the 1913 report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration to the Secretary of Commerce and Labor on the effectiveness of the Chinese Exclusion Law. Along with the plethora of data in each annual report, the Commissioner-Generals included summary text on what they saw in the data.

Interesting enough, the 1903 summary text was basically touting the effectiveness of the exclusion laws while the 1913 report saw grave short comings with it. The extra few thousand Chinese immigrants each year basically fed the suspicions that Chinese were cheating the exclusion laws.


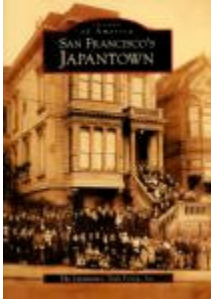

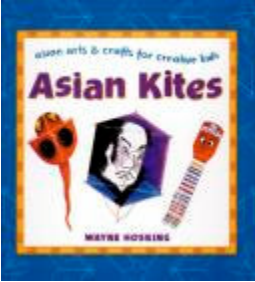

Like today's immigration debates, many people in the late 1800s and early 1900s were quite disturbed by what would happen if undesirables were allowed to freely come and become legal residents and citizens. And as a result the first immigration laws were written to prevent certain groups like the Chinese from coming. The passage from the 1913 report was just a reminder of how, in over 100 years, little has changed except for which group is considered the law breakers and undesirables.

Upon reading all the many stories on the 1906 Earthquake and Katrina Hurricane, one could see similarities between the two. Like New Orleans the poor ethnic communities were particularly hit hard. Chinatown and the various Japanese communities in the city were essentially decimated and little care was given to rescue efforts or even the counting of the dead.

In the aftermath of the Earthquake, ethnic minorities like the Chinese were segregated and given poor locations for temporary encampments. Some city leaders seriously considered permanently moving all Chinese out of San Francisco and much thought and negotiating went into the consideration of where Chinatown should be rebuilt. In the end Chinatown was rebuilt in its original location mainly for economic reasons rather than a desire to have the Chinese back.



The following books are discounted an additional 20% from the listed price for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end May 5, 2006.

	<p><b>The Earth Dragon Awakes</b>  <b>The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906</b></p> <p>By Laurence Yep          2006, 113 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Follow the lives of young Henry and his Chinese friend Chin as they dealing with the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. This is acclaimed young adult author Laurence Yep's latest historical novel. Included in the back of the book are actual pictures from the earthquake, a short history section, and a resources list.</p> <p>Item #3399, Price \$14.99 - for newsletter subscribers <b>\$11.99</b></p>
	<p><b>San Francisco's Japantown</b></p> <p>By the Japantown Task Force, Inc.          2005, 128 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>In the wake of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire a new Japantown was born. On this 100th anniversary, it's fascinating to see over 200 pictures of a community's history. The sparing amounts of text and captions gives just enough information to prime your curiosity and interest for many hours. This is a must have book for anyone familiar with San Francisco's Japantown.</p> <p>Item #3398, Price \$19.99 - for newsletter subscribers <b>\$15.99</b></p>
	<p><b>Earthquake</b></p> <p>By Milly Lee          Illustrated by Yangsook Choi          2006, 29 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>A young Chinese American girl tells the story of surviving the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. This timely reissuing, in paperback form, of Milly Lee's story book, will help introduce young readers to a harrowing chapter in American history.</p> <p>Item #3395, Price \$6.95 - for newsletter subscribers <b>\$5.56</b></p>
	<p><b>Asian Kites</b>  <b>Asian Arts &amp; Crafts for Creative Kids</b></p> <p>By Wayne Hosking          2005, 63 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>It's kite season and what better way to kick it off than by building some Asian style kites. This book includes kite flying directions, cultural and historical background on various kite flying Asian countries, as well as kite making directions.</p> <p>Item #3396, Price \$12.95 - for newsletter subscribers <b>\$10.36</b></p>
	<p><b>Kite Flying</b></p> <p>By Grace Lin          2002, 24 pages, Paperback.</p> <p><i>Kite Flying</i> is a delightful little story of how a family works together to build and fly a dragon kite. The best part is the short text in the back, which gives some interesting background on the Chinese kite flying traditions.</p> <p>Item #3397, Price \$6.99 - for newsletter subscribers <b>\$5.59</b></p>

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