

A MEMORABLE DAY 70 YEARS AGO
by H. M. Lai

Seventy years ago in September, 1911, an event occurred in San Francisco Chinatown which helped to speed the demise of the imperial system in China. During this month, Sun Yat-sen and his followers launched the final campaign to raise funds for the overthrow of the Qing dynasty.

For Sun, this had been a long uphill fight. He had started on the path of revolution when as a young man in his late twenties, he had returned to Hawaii, where he had spent his boyhood days, to seek help from fellow Chinese. However, with the empire seemingly as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar, Sun was only able to gain the support of his brother Sun Mei and a small circle of friends and fellow villagers. In 1894 he established his first revolutionary organization, the Xingzhonghui (Revive China Society) in Honolulu. After an abortive putsch in Guangzhou, he returned again to Hawaii, and then went on to the U.S. mainland in 1896. There he found some sympathizers among the small Chinese Christian community in such people as Walter N. Fong; however, because of fear of retribution from the imperial government, few others dared to espouse his cause openly.

In 1904, Sun came again and arrived at the U.S. mainland. Learning from his first failure, Sun joined the Triads in Honolulu so as to assure that the doors of this secret society, widespread on the continent, would be opened to him on the continent as a source of support. He also took out papers certifying that he was born in Hawaii (which he was not), in order to facilitate this and subsequent entries into the United States.

Upon arrival, Sun was held for several weeks by the immigration officials in the detention shed at the Pacific Mail Co. wharf. It was only through the combined efforts of Chee Kung Tong (Triads) leaders Wong Sam Ark and Tong King Chon, and publisher Ng Poon Chew of the Chung Sai Yat Po, that he was finally allowed to land. 4

Sun subsequently won the support of key Chee Kung Tong leaders in San Francisco and traveled across the United States with Wong Kim Ark to seek support for the revolution. However, at this time, the influence of the rival Reform Party among the Chinese populace in America was strong, even among the supposedly anti-Manchu Triads. Sun was unable to make much headway. In fact, some unbelievers jeeringly called him "Sun Daipao" (Sun the Big Talker.)

Sun then left the United States to return to Japan via Europe. In 1905, several Chinese revolutionary societies in Japan united to form a single organization, the Tongmenghui (United Covenanters Society.) The next few years saw fund raising efforts for the revolution concentrating on the Chinese in Southeast Asia. But in 1910 Sun was back again in the United States. As he went across the country to raise funds, he formed chapters of the Tongmenghui in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. He also persuaded young supporters in San Francisco to reorganize their Youth Weekly into a daily paper, The Young China. By this time, the situation had turned favorable to the revolutionary forces in China as the Manchu rule continued to slide downhill.

Sun returned in early 1911 to raise money for uprisings to administer the coup de grace to the tottering regime. This time he found the support which was previously denied to him. Canadian Triad leaders mortgaged properties in Victoria, Toronto, and Montreal to raise \$50,000. But in the United States, he found that the "Young Turks" of the San Francisco Tongmenghui was unable to work with the Triads and fund raising results were disappointed. Sun had to play the role of mediator and talked the Tongmenghui members into joining the Chee Kung Tung. This occurred in June, 1911.

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