

A Brief History of the Chinese World

By HIM MARK LAI

ED. NOTE: *Him Mark Lai is an active member of the Society, this year's president, and in addition to a regular vocation as a Bechtel engineer, finds time to do research and write articles on Chinese American history.*

The *Chinese World* was one of the most important newspapers in San Francisco's Chinese community for many decades. It had its beginnings in 1892¹ as the *Mon Hing Bo* (*Wen-hsing Pao*), a Chinatown commercial enterprise. During the first years of the 20th century, when many concerned Chinese were debating the political course of the motherland, the journal became the organ of the Chinese Empire Reform Association², which, in later years became known as the Chinese Constitutionalist Party³. During this period the English name of the newspaper was changed to *Chinese World*.⁴

In 1906 the San Francisco earthquake razed the offices of the newspaper. The owners then bought the plant of a Japanese newspaper in Fresno and moved to Los Angeles, where they set up operations to publish the *Hin Jing Bo* (*Hsien-cheng Pao*)⁵. In 1908 however, the Constitutionalist decided San Francisco would be a more suitable location to propagate its political program and returned the newspaper to the city by the Golden Gate. At this time the Chinese name of the paper was changed to *Sai Gai Yat Po*⁶ (no relation to the present paper of the same name, which is the overseas edition of the *United Daily News* of Taiwan), to be in accord with the name in English.

During this period the *Chinese World* was but one of a number of newspaper organs established by the reformers in major Chinese communities abroad⁷. It advocated reform of the Chinese empire and establishment of a constitutional monarchy. At the same time it was a strong supporter of Confucianism and tradition. The newspaper became the chief spokesman for moderate to conservative forces in the Chinese community. It often engaged in hot editorial debates with Chinatown newspapers which supported more basic and, for the period, very radical changes, in Chinese society. On occasion these verbal battles even erupted into physical action⁸.

After the 1911 Revolution, the Constitutionalist Party and the *Chinese World* gave their support to the newly-founded republic. Soon afterward Sun Yat-sen and the Kuomintang broke with the warlord-controlled Peking regime and in the 1920's established a revolutionary base in Canton. The Constitutionalist looked upon this new regime as "bolshevik" and dangerously radical. The *Chinese World* bitterly assailed the southern government and continued to regard the Peking regime as the legitimate ruler of China. During this period there were numerous vituperative and caustic editorial exchanges between the *Chinese World* and the Kuomintang party organ, the *Young China*, as they battled to win the support of the Chinese population in America.

This opposition continued even after the Kuomintang established the Nanking Government in 1927. The *Chinese World* refused to fly the new national flag decreed by the regime⁹. It attacked the one-party rule of the Nationalists. As a result, the *Chinese World* was put on the list of publications banned in China¹⁰, and the Nationalist government even tried unsuccessfully to deport Wu Chuang (Wu Hsien-Tzu), the paper's editor.¹¹

However, with the ascendancy of Kuomintang power in China, the fortunes of the Constitutionalist Party declined rapidly. The party membership dropped. So did the

readership of its journals. One by one its newspaper organs in various cities closed. By the end of the 1930's only the *New China Daily Press* of Honolulu and the *Chinese World* remained. During the mid-1940's these newspapers came to depend on financial subsidies from the family of Chun Quon of the S. Q. Yee Hop interests of Honolulu for survival.

At the end of World War II in 1945, Dai Ming Lee was appointed publisher and managing editor of the *Chinese World*¹². Lee, a forceful and energetic personality, blew a breath of life into what was then a spiritless, slowly-dying publication and revitalized it into a powerful voice in the community. During the late 1940's and early 1950's it became the leading daily in San Francisco's Chinatown with reported circulation figures approaching 9,000.

During this period the *World* was one of the few Chinese language newspapers to depart from an exclusive interest in China politics and to recognize the importance of community issues. In this area the paper spoke generally for the interests of the growing Chinese American middle class which had developed during the 1930's and 1940's in San Francisco's Chinese community. This development was also probably one of the factors prompting the publication of an English edition of the *World* on Dec. 1, 1949.

The English edition was not the first English newspaper in Chinatown, but it was the longest lived, continuing for two decades until the newspaper's demise in 1969. Its publication added a new dimension to news reporting on the Chinese community by publishing items on activities of Chinese Americans, which had usually been neglected in the Chinese language press. The appearance of this English edition was an indication of the growing importance of the Chinese-American sector of the Chinese community.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the *Chinese World* took an anti-Kuomintang, anti-Communist stance in China politics. This drew attacks from the left and right and on at least three occasions, Lee had to call for police protection against possible attacks on the *Chinese World* by Kuomintang supporters¹³.

Throughout the 1950's the newspaper advocated the idea of a third force as an alternative to the Kuomintang and the Communists. The Constitutionalist party worked with the Chee Kung Tong, and other conservative non-Kuomintang Chinese political groups, as well as prominent anti-Chiang Kuomintang exiles such as Li Tsung-jen, to establish such a political alliance. However, the efforts were a complete failure.

In 1957, apparently in an attempt to strengthen ties with elements of the third force on the Eastern seaboard, an ill-advised decision was made to start a New York edition of the *World*. After suffering serious financial losses, the enterprise closed down in 1959. Soon afterward, in 1961, Lee passed away.

This was the beginning of the end, for without a strong personality at the helm, the newspaper floundered and deficits mounted. For a time it was tied up in a law suit by dissident stockholders. The final blow came when the general manager left without notice¹⁴. The flow of desperately needed funds stopped, and the *Chinese World* had to cease publication in 1969. At that time it was the oldest existing Chinese newspaper in America.

In 1970 Honolulu's Commercial Enterprise, Ltd., bought the newspaper's property at auction, in preparation for a comeback which never materialized¹⁵. Since the building, ownership of which was separate from that of the paper, was sold, the firm finally decided to dispose of the newspaper's property.

During the Bicentennial Conference held by the Chinese Historical Society of America in July, 1975, a representative acting for Commercial Enterprise approached the Society for suggestions on disposal of this material. In the past year Philip Choy and Mark Lai have been sorting through and removing piles of old letters, publications, newspapers, photographs, and artifacts from the *Chinese World's* old building at 738 Grant Avenue, which had also housed the former headquarters of the Chinese Democratic Constitutionalist Party¹⁶.

The *Chinese World* collection had been eagerly sought after by several university libraries in the Bay Area. However Commercial Enterprise decided to donate it to the San Francisco Public Library for easy accessibility by researchers on Chinese American history. Our Historical Society was the recipient of an incomplete set of newspapers as well as a quantity of books, archival material, pictures and artifacts which still await further organization.

During its years of existence, the *Chinese World* had had many editors noted for their excellent literary styles. Some of them, such as C. K. Leang and Wu Chuang were scholars in the old tradition. Others had in later years gone on to prominence in the humanities and arts. This together with the fact that the *World* was an effective spokesman for important political factions among the Chinese in America made the collection a rich and important source for research into Chinese American history.

The file at the San Francisco Public Library includes issues dating from 1909 through 1969. This collection together with the issues of the *Chung Sai Yat Po* (1900-1951) at the University of California at Berkeley and the *Young China* (1910-present) at the State Library in Sacramento, will yield rewarding materials to Chinese American historians for some years to come.

Those wishing to read the *Chinese World* should make their request at least one day in advance to the Californiana Room of the San Francisco Main Library to allow time for retrieval from storage.

FOOTNOTES

1. Even the *Chinese World* itself appears to be uncertain as to whether its founding was 1891 or 1892. The masthead of the English edition states that the newspaper was founded in 1891. But a brochure, *Mei-kuo San-fan-shih Shih-chieh Jih-pao Ssu-shih-nien Chi-nien Cheng-wen Hsiao-ch'i* (MSSJSCCH, *Short Message Soliciting Essays for Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of the Chinese World of San Francisco, U.S.A.*), gave the founding date as 1892. The California Historical Society has a copy of the *Chinese World* dated Jan. 13, 1904 or the 27th day of the 11th moon of Kwang-hsu, Vol. XII, No. 337. At that time each volume ran from the 1st moon through the 12th moon of the lunar calendar. Thus, Vol. XIII would have begun in February of that year. Counting backward from this number, the founding date should be 1892, if each volume of the newspaper covered one year.
2. According to MSSJSCCH, the San Francisco chapter of the Chinese Empire Reform Association was founded in November (the 10th moon), 1899. Around that date the *Mon Hing Bo* became its party organ and changed to a daily newspaper.
3. According to Wu Hsien-tzu's *Chung-kuo Min-chu Hsien-cheng-tang Tang-shih* (*History of the Chinese Democratic Constitutionalist Party* (San Francisco (1946?)) p. 46, the Chinese Empire Reform Association changed its name to Chinese Constitutionalist Party in 1906.
4. W.P.A. Project, E. Daggett, Supv. *History of Foreign Journalism in San Francisco*, V.I (San Francisco, 1939) p. 50.
5. MSSJSCCH. Also R. L. Soble *A History of the Chinese World* (M.A. thesis, Stanford University, 1962) p. 27.
6. MSSJSCCH.
7. Other party organs were *Sun Chung Kwock Bo* (*New China Daily Press*) of Honolulu (founded 1900), *Chinese Reform Gazette* of Vancouver, B.C., Canada (founded 1903),

and the *Chinese Reform News* of New York City (founded 1904). There were also reformer newspapers established in Japan, Singapore, Sidney (Australia), Siam, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Canton.

8. One such example occurred in 1911. For more than a month starting in late 1910 the *Chung Sai Yat Po* (CSYP) and the *Chinese World* engaged in an editorial battle regarding Christianity and Confucianism with the CSYP for Christianity and the *Chinese World* taking the side of Confucianism. In the course of the debate, the CSYP editor on January 13, 1911 illustrated his point by giving a parable of a Sunning District person who, upon learning that taro roots were a valuable native product, dined on it exclusively, thus giving himself indigestion. Certain elements of the Ning Yung Association treated the story as an insult to the people of Sunning. The CSYP was boycotted and its offices mobbed by people from the association. The affair finally had to go before the Chinese Six Companies for adjudication.
9. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 23, 1929: "Editor Flies Old Republic Flag of China."
10. Uncatalogued Kuomintang documents at the library of the University of California, Davis included such a list, probably dating from the early 1930's.
11. *New York Times*, June 23, 1929: "China Wants Editor Back."
12. Chun Quon sent Dai Ming Lee to San Francisco in 1945 to reorganize the *Chinese World*. See *Chinese World*, Aug. 21, 1954 "Ching Tao Pen-pao Tsung-li Ch'en K'un Hsien-sheng." ("We Respectfully Grieve the Passing of General Manager Chun Quon of Our Paper").
13. Letters, Dai Ming Lee to San Francisco Police Chief Michael Gaffey, May 22, June 15, 1951.
14. Form letter to be sent by *Chinese World* to former advertisers and subscribers asking for payment.
15. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 19, 1970: "Chinese World is Sold."
16. The Chinese Constitutionalist Party changed its name to Chinese Democratic Constitutionalist Party in 1945. See Wu Hsien-tzu, *op cited*, p. 140.

The First Chinese Bank in the United States

By WILLIAM K. LUKE

Chinatown News, Vancouver, B.C., July 3, 1974

The first Chinese bank in the United States was founded by Look Poong-shan of San Francisco, in 1906. Located on the corner of Clay and Kearny Streets facing a small park [Portsmouth Square], it was a state registered institution called the Canton Bank.

Look Poong-shan was born in Mendocino, California and had a unique racial background. His mother was an American Indian woman. He was the youngest in the family of four children, three boys and a girl. When they reached school age his father sent them back to China, along with his mother, to study Chinese.

After they all had acquired a fair Chinese education they came back to America, settled in San Francisco and attended American schools there. Poong-shan was a brilliant student and completed his high school education in due time with good grades.

At that time, the Russo-Asiatic Bank of San Francisco was looking for a talented Chinese boy with a fair knowledge of Chinese to join their foreign exchange department. This bank, with headquarters in Russia and branch banks throughout the Far East handled a large volume of foreign exchange from South America. They were mostly Chinese remittances being sent back to Hong Kong and funnelled through the San Francisco office.