

# Maurice H. Chuck and the *San Francisco Journal*

## Promoting U.S.-China Friendship and Asian American Issues

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Extracts from "Yige ren chuangban liao Shidai Bao" 《一個人創辦〈時代報〉》 [Single-handedly founded *San Francisco Journal*], chapter 6 of Xiong Guohua, Meiji Huaren Huang Yunji zhuanqi: Meiguo meng [An American dream: The life and times of Huang Yunji (Maurice H. Chuck), Chinese American] (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 2002) 熊國華：《美籍華人黃運基傳奇：美國夢》（廣州：花城出版社，2002年）

Huang Yunji (Maurice H. Chuck) was born in 1932 in Doumen in Guangdong's Pearl River Delta. His father emigrated to California, leaving his family in the village. The year the Sino-Japanese War began, his wife passed away, leaving young Huang Yunji and his sister in the care of their uncle, who was a poor peasant. Huang Yunji's father returned to China after the war and in 1948 brought his sixteen-year-old son to California.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the Chinese Exclusion Act, which from 1882 to 1943 allowed only certain categories of Chinese immigrants to enter the United States, Huang Yunji's father had entered the country by assuming the identity of a Chinese American surnamed Chuck. Thus in America Huang Yunji became Chuck Joong Mun 卓忠民, or Maurice H. Chuck, son of an American citizen.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after young Chuck landed, he became a frequent visitor to the Oasis Bookstore 綠原書店, which sold Chinese literature, including many works of a progressive nature. The proprietor allowed Chuck, who had had only four years of formal education in China, to browse in the store. New friends he met there induced introduced him to join the Chinese American Democratic Youth League 三藩市民主青年團, a progressive cultural youth group. These contacts inspired Chuck to become interested in progressive Chinese culture, especially in literature. Chuck soon also began his long association with Chinese American journalism, working as Chinese typesetter at the *Chinese Pacific Weekly* 太平洋週報 and then *Chung Sai Yat Po* 中西日報. Through these contacts and self-study Chuck expanded his knowledge of Chinese history and culture and improved his literary writing style. He also began to submit his writings to publications such as *China Daily News* 美洲華僑日報 of New York.<sup>3</sup>

Soon after he was inducted into the army in 1953, army intelligence discovered his writings, which were sympathetic

to the PRC and expressed opposition to the Korean conflict. In 1955 he was given an undesirable discharge, which was upgraded to an honorable discharge only after several years of legal proceedings on his behalf by the American Civil Liberties Union. Worse was to come.<sup>4</sup> During the early 1960s the government intimidated Maurice Chuck's father into confessing his false claim of American citizenship and then indicted his son for falsely claiming U.S. citizenship when applying for a citizenship certificate while serving in the army at Fort Lewis, Washington, in 1954. The key government witness was Maurice Chuck's hapless father, whom the government forced to testify against his own son. Chuck was found guilty and given a three-month jail sentence.<sup>5</sup> However, in spite of all these adverse events, Chuck held on to this political beliefs.

By the late 1960s the political atmosphere in the United States was changing, spurred by the Civil Rights movement. In 1967 Chuck received a big opportunity when *East/West* 東西報, the bilingual Chinese American weekly, hired him as chief editor. His writings supported the increasing calls for a more rational U.S. policy toward the PRC. In early 1971 he became one of the founders of the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association in San Francisco. In 1972, after successive editorships at *Chinese World* 世界日報 and *Chinese Voice*, Chuck founded the weekly *San Francisco Journal* 時代報 during the same week U.S. President Nixon was on his historic visit to the PRC. The paper went on to become a daily in 1983, but lacking the deep financial resources available to the Hong Kong-based *Sing Tao Daily* 星島日報 and the Taiwan-backed *World Journal* 世界日報, the *San Francisco Journal* found it difficult to compete effectively with them for subscribers and advertisers, and in the end it had to cease publication.

Chuck's literary writings to date consist of several collections of essays and commentaries as well as three works of fiction, all published in China. He was one of the founders of the Chinese Literature and Art Association in America 美國華文藝界協會 in March 1994 and served as chairman of the group for three consecutive terms from 1998 through 2003. In spring 1995 he was the principal financial backer of the bimonthly *The Literati* (*Meihua Wenhua Ren Bao* 美華文化人報), which began publication in February 1995. In

June 1998 its Chinese name was changed to *Meihua Wenxue* 美華文學.<sup>6</sup>—HML

The founding of the new China gave Huang Yunji (Maurice H. Chuck) hope but also made him homesick for his motherland. When he was working as a typesetter for newspapers he witnessed how, by his own hands, words were turned into essays and essays into newspapers that reached thousands of readers. A dream was born: he wanted to be a reporter, an editor, and better yet, to publish his own newspaper. He had so much to say; writing articles and publishing a newspaper seemed to be the best way to transmit his thoughts. To realize this “American dream,” Chuck strove diligently, step by step.

After his release from prison in the mid-1960s, Chuck’s political infamy prevented him from finding work in San Francisco. He moved to the suburban town of Mountain View with his wife and daughter and toiled for a number of years on a chrysanthemum farm. Having saved up a small sum of hard-earned money, he made a tour of American cities and returned to write a series of articles for *East/West*, a new weekly newspaper in San Francisco’s Chinatown. His topics ranged from American politics and the Civil Rights movement to economic issues. The editor of *East/West* appreciated his writings and always arranged their immediate publication. There was no monetary reward for contributing these articles, but Chuck’s love of journalism and literary expression, the opportunity to communicate his views on world and American affairs, and the need of an outlet for the feelings buried in his heart urged him on. He continued writing tirelessly and derived great pleasure from such discourse.

Finally heaven was moved: Chuck was offered a job as editor at *East/West* with a monthly salary of \$300. Chuck took his first job as editor earnestly and very seriously. *East/West* was the first Chinese newspaper printed on an offset press. While meeting stringent editorial deadlines, Chuck learned typing, cutting and pasting, darkroom techniques, and the principles of offset-printing technology.

In 1968, Chuck landed an editor’s position at *Chinese World*, a Chinese-language daily, and he continued to contribute articles to other Chinese newspapers. The following year, noted San Francisco journalist John Ong 翁紹裘 invited Chuck to join him in cofounding *Chinese Voice*, a new Chinese weekly. Assuming the positions of editor in chief and general manager, Chuck began emerging as a journalist in his own right.

Chuck started the *San Francisco Journal* in a small office in San Francisco Chinatown. A desk, a telephone, and a \$200 Double Dove Chinese typewriter were its only assets. But Chuck soon gained the support of his friends Jimmy Leung 梁源洲 and Henry Mah 馬開湛, who became the *Journal*’s earliest shareholders.

Imagine a day in the new entrepreneur’s life running his one-man operation as publisher, editor, reporter, typist,

proofreader, manager, agent, gofer, and custodian all at once. In fact, he was the *San Francisco Journal* itself!

Chuck’s unwavering passion as a journalist and his perseverance in realizing an ideal drew out the tremendous potential in him. The early *San Francisco Journal* was a twenty-four-page Chinese-English bilingual weekly. The volume of work involved was enormous. Chuck would gather the news, write his articles, lay out the pages, and then send the camera-ready pages to the print shop. He would later pick up the fresh-off-the-press papers and deliver them to newsstands. No one paid him any salary, and the risk of bankruptcy constantly loomed over his head. In addition to handling the heavy workload at the *Journal*, he had to work several hours a day at a restaurant he and his wife co-owned with their friend Harry Yuen. What he earned from the restaurant he used to cover the cost of publishing the *Journal*. Often when fatigue overcame him after a few days with very little sleep, he would take a nap to recuperate, then immerse himself again in the newspaper that he so loved.

Whether by historical fortuity or by intent, February 23, 1972, the date of the inaugural issue of the *San Francisco Journal*, fell in the same week that President Nixon made his historical journey to China. The headline read, “Icebreaking Journey: President Nixon Visits China!”

#### THE SAN FRANCISCO JOURNAL: A BIG, HAPPY FAMILY

The *San Francisco Journal* was the only Chinese-language publication in San Francisco that devoted a large amount of space to news from mainland China. Advocating friendly relations between China and the United States and opposing U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, the paper quickly became a thorn in the Kuomintang’s side. Shortly after it began publication, Chuck received an envelope that contained a bullet and a note scribbled in red ink: “WANTED: YOUR LIFE!” This would have scared some people, but Chuck believed what he was doing was just. He refused to submit to the threat and continued to publish his newspaper. He despised the Kuomintang operatives’ underhanded tactics. The more they tried to thwart his work, the more determined he became, and he worked even harder to produce a better newspaper. This is the essence of Chuck.

As the *San Francisco Journal* established a distinct voice in San Francisco’s Chinese community, conscientious and fair-minded volunteers started to rally around Chuck and join his cause. Initially Chuck did everything himself with occasional help from friends. Soon six or seven people offered their assistance. At one point, the volunteer *Journal* staff numbered over fifty. Among them were immigrants from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, along with American-born Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Caucasians, and African Americans. It was amazing that in a wealth-conscious