

Chinatown is at once many things to many people. To thousands of ignorant tourists and visitors, it is the closest thing to visiting "exotic" China and for watching the strange "Chinese creatures" at work. For store-keepers, restaurateurs, "sweat" shop and land owners, it is a sure place for making easy money off the disadvantaged Chinese, commanding respect of the poor, and making-believe that they are living in China. For the Bay Area middle-class Chinese and Chinese college students, it is a place for Chinese grocery and occasional Chinese dinners. But, for the majority of Chinatown residents, especially the recent immigrants, it is a concentration camp where they must fight for minimum survival means and where their way of life is poverty and degradation.

Chinatown is unquestionably a ghetto to in every sense of the word. Cultural and language barriers have prevented the over-crowded population from seeking employment outside of the confines of Chinatown. High unemployment and under-employment rates provide fertile ground for small-time opportunist businessmen to exploit at will the helpless and the poor of their own race to the fullest extent. 75¢ per hour and 10-13 hours of work per day are common practices in Chinatown. Substandard housing, tuberculosis, suicide, mental illness and juvenile delinquency are widespread in spite of constant efforts to hide these phenomena and to discredit and sometimes violently suppress those who try to expose the problems and seek government help.

Historical injustice committed against the Chinese in the U.S., Chinese traditionalism and ethnocentrism are among the factors contributing to the existing deplorable ghetto conditions in Chinatown. But the social expectation of the predominant white society also plays a crucial role in determining the behavior and fate of the Chinese in the U.S. Chinese people have always been considered hard-working,

inscrutable, patient, quiet, non-militant people with lasting endurance and self-respect.

In short, Chinese are expected to be super-human and take the worst in stride. This popular Chinese myth is held by both the white and the Chinese alike. The Chinatown establishment especially uses it as a means of suppressing and exploiting the humble, the weak and the meek; Chinese college students use it as an excuse for tolerating social injustice and for not asserting their rights as U.S. citizens; middle-class Chinese employ it as a self-righteous weapon against those who protest social injustice. In other words, the desire to live up to the popular expectation has crippled the entire Chinese population, including the Chinese college students, preventing them to think and act independently...We Chinese act the way we are expected to act.

As long as those who "made it" maintain a hands-off "Uncle Tom" attitude, the Chinese will continue to be exploited by our own "warlords" and the majority white society, and Chinatown's problems will forever be neglected by the government. As for the foreign-born Chinese college students who take pride in so-called Chinese culture and "identity," they had better re-examine critically their values and attitude and start thinking on their own because they are among those who are perpetuating the Chinese myth and destroying any opportunity for Chinatown to pull out of its degrading conditions. The problems in Chinatown are our problems. We must free ourselves from the tyranny of this Chinese myth, to solve our problems.

Endurance, working hard, patience and quietness are good virtues in any society, especially in China, but when they become a license for exploitation and governmental negligence, as we now witness in San Francisco, they ought to be re-examined in the light of the American political, social and economic reality.

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(The following paragraph is from the other side.)

Chinese people have much to contribute to the American society, but what good is it to talk about cultural and scientific contributions if basic human needs are not being met and our people are being subjected to sub-human conditions?

INTERCOLLEGIATE CHINESE FOR SOCIAL ACTION

--Official Statement--

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San Francisco State, a community college, exists in a moral vacuum, oblivious to the community it purports to serve. It does not "reflect" the pluralistic society that is San Francisco; it does not begin to serve the 300,000 non-white people who live in this urban community in poverty, in ignorance and in despair. The Chinese ghetto, Chinatown, is a case in point.

1. San Francisco State has a Chinese Language Department that isolates the "Chinese experience" as a cultural phenomena in a language that 83% of the Chinese in the United States do not speak. Realistically, we can expect that a Chinese woman, living in the ghetto, who speaks Cantonese cannot explain to the scholar that she is dying of tuberculosis because she speaks a "street language", while the scholar mutters classical poetry in Mandarin. San Francisco State College does not teach Cantonese.

2. Chinatown is a GHETTO. In San Francisco there are approximately 80,000 Chinese of whom the vast majority live in Chinatown. It is an area of old buildings, narrow streets and alleys and the effluvia of a great deal of people packed into a very small space. At present, more than 5,000 new Chinese immigrants stream into this overpopulated ghetto each year, an area already blessed with a birth rate that is rising, and will rise more. Chinatown is basically a tenement. Tuberculosis is endemic, rents are high and constantly rising, city services are inadequate to provide reasonable sanitation, and space is at such a premium as to resemble the Malthusian ratio at its most extreme conclusion.

There are no adequate courses in any department or school at San Francisco State that even begin to deal with problems of the Chinese people in this exclusionary and racist environment.

We therefore support the establishment of a School of Ethnic Studies and further submit (under separate cover) our proposal for the establishment of a Chinese Ethnic Studies Department within that school that will begin to attack the problems that exist in the Chinese Community and to address itself to the problems of acculturation and identity for Chinese people in the United States.

INTERCOLLEGIATE CHINESE FOR SOCIAL ACTION

"I.C.S.A."

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This open organization welcomes all questions. Feel free to contact for a large or small meeting.

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