ONE

Transnational Celebrations in Changing Political Climates

In 1951 San Francisco’s Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) staged a Chinese New Year celebration to “support the anticommunism policy of the U.S. government.” The parade departed from the CCBA headquarters on Stockton Street, taking Sutter Street to Grant Avenue, the main tourist thoroughfare, and then returned to the CCBA. With the police leading the procession, six hundred Chinese American school children and several hundred adults marched with placards stating “Down With Communism” and “Preserve Your Heritage of Freedom.” The march ended with a meeting hosted by the Anti-Communist League pledging a Chinese American anticommunist stance and unfailing patriotism to the United States.¹

The parade’s celebratory spirit was dampened not only by a firecracker ban, but also by a holiday goods shortage, the result of an embargo against the People’s Republic of China (PRC) that went into effect after it entered the Korean War in 1950. The embargo had affected Chinatown’s tourist business, which depended on the ability of various curio shops to sell Chinese goods.²

Political oppression and economic recession were major concerns in many Chinese American communities in the early 1950s. As a result, ethnic leaders transformed the Chinese New Year from a private celebration into a public demonstration of their U.S. patriotism and anticommunist
conviction in the early 1950s. Why did community leaders choose to show their patriotism through the Chinese New Year and not other ethnic holidays? How did the mid-twentieth-century celebration differ from the previous decades? What can the history of Chinese New Year celebrations tell us about Chinese American history in general?

Although the mainstream society had been attracted to the Chinese New Year since the mid-nineteenth century, the ethnic community failed to have a consensus over the celebration. White writers and photographers shared their observations about ethnic holidays in popular publications. The San Francisco Chronicle, a major San Francisco newspaper, covered the festivities annually. After the Republic of China (ROC) overthrew the Qing government in 1911, the Chinese American community had been obsessed with the question of whether to celebrate the new year. Political upheaval in China was one factor that affected Chinese American attitudes toward ethnic celebration, but there were also other factors as well, including the acculturation of Chinese Americans and the relationship between China and the United States.

**PRE–COLD WAR CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATION**

In 1880, Catherine Baldwin shared her experience of San Francisco Chinatown’s Chinese New Year celebration with readers in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine. Invited by a friend to join the festivity, she was delighted to see the neighborhood decorated with red strips of paper featuring Chinese calligraphy. She wrote: “Gorgeous lanterns were suspended in front of doors or hung in rows from the numerous balconies. The flags of the Consulate, of the Six Companies, of the several temples, etc., fluttered in the breeze.” She reported that firecrackers were set off to drive away evil spirits while “Celestials” dressed in new silk or satin clothes crowded the streets to pay off debts or prepare for the holiday since all stores would be closed for three days. On the Chinese New Year’s Eve, Chinatown residents first worshipped ancestors or family gods and then feasted. The following day, she saw that Chinatown was filled with well-dressed men who were on their way to visit friends or relatives. During this celebratory period, she observed, gambling was the most popular form of entertainment, while the Cantonese opera in the Grand Theatre on Clay Street came in second.²

The vital community described by Baldwin was the oldest Chinese American enclave in the United States. Chinese first settled on a single block of Sacramento Street and then spread north to Dupont Street (later...
Figure 1. Mainstream publications were fascinated by Chinese New Year celebrations. The cover of *Wave* magazine, for example, printed Arnold Genthe’s photos of Chinese New Year visitors in Chinatown. Courtesy of Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
renamed Grant) in the mid-1850s. The community quickly expanded from six or eight blocks in 1876 to more than twelve blocks in 1885. New Chinese arrivals flocked to the area to open shops and establish residence. They added signs and placards to local buildings, giving the area a distinct character. The numerous Chinese arrivals or transits to or through the area increased its economic vitality. Accordingly, Chinatown emerged as a commercial and service center for many Chinese immigrants. The services provided by these immigrants, such as houseboys and laundry shops, extended to the entire city. They also successfully entered many light manufacturing industries, such as textiles, shoes, and cigars.4

During this time, district (huiguan) and family (surname) associations were established in the Chinese American community to provide social welfare services to members as well as to defend their rights. The CCBA, also known as the Chinese Six Companies, was the most prominent of these organizations. Established loosely in the 1860s and then formalized in 1882, the CCBA became the governing body of Chinatown, as all district and family associations followed its regulations. Similar institutions sprang up in other Chinese American communities, all of which submitted to the leadership of the CCBA in San Francisco. Dominated by immigrant merchants and elites, the CCBA fought against anti-Chinese legislation through the judicial system, with mostly negative results. The political disenfranchisement of Chinese immigrants propelled the CCBA into the position of broker between the ethnic community and the dominant society.5

Chinese immigrants brought old world traditions and rituals—including Chinese New Year celebrations—to the host country. These old world rituals served as a link between immigrants and their home countries and created a sense of community in their adopted country. Those who worked as houseboys or in the surrounding areas came back to Chinatown to celebrate the festivities, and district and family associations sponsored banquets and lion dances to forge bonds among members.6

The observation of ethnic traditions generated and revealed interracial tensions, which had a dampening effect. More than a dozen Chinese immigrants were arrested for violating the city’s ban on fireworks in the 1876 Chinese New Year celebration.7 Firecrackers had significant cultural meanings to many Chinese Americans, as they believed that firecrackers could scare away devils and evil spirits. The practice of setting off firecrackers in the ethnic celebration started right after Chinese immigration to the United States. The ban on firecrackers, mostly for noise control,
sometimes was attributed to a discriminatory policy. After all, fireworks and firecrackers had been part of Independence Day celebrations throughout U.S. history, and even though the use of fireworks was technically illegal, authorities were very lenient toward offenders on the Fourth of July.\(^8\) In part, the crackdown on the Chinese use of fireworks stemmed from sensational reportage of tong wars in the media; the police did not want fireworks to be mistaken for bullets.\(^9\)

The firecracker ban was not the only factor that diminished the celebratory spirit; the elimination of the Chinese New Year celebration under the ROC turned out to have a greater effect on the ethnic celebration. After the Qing government was overthrown, the new Republican government set about modernizing China. It abolished the lunar calendar, thereby eliminating the Chinese New Year. The CCBA of San Francisco announced the new policy and urged everyone to follow it, allowing a one-year grace period to accommodate local practices. Many ethnic leaders in other parts of the country also endorsed the new policy to keep apace of China’s modernizing effort. John Tim Loy, an ethnic spokesperson in Nevada County, California, claimed that 1912 was to be the last Chinese New Year celebration. He stated, “The revolutionary movement has brought many things to pass, and now we have president. Next Year we celebrate New Year alle [sic] same American on first day of the year.”\(^10\) As a result, fewer people honored the ethnic holiday.\(^11\)

The acculturation of the Chinese American community also played an important role in the decline of ethnic celebration. During the 1920s and 1930s Chinese New Year celebrations, visitors noticed that Chinese American flappers and their male companions dressed in Western-style suits. Mainstream newspapers also reported and printed children clad in store-bought Western-style attire during the festivities. Meanwhile, community newspapers lamented the waning of ethnic celebration in the community.\(^12\)

Numerous working-class Chinese immigrants, however, continued to honor the Chinese New Year. In the days leading up to the new year, Grant Avenue was filled with booths selling holiday goods such as lilies, fruits, candies, and other delicacies. Many people decorated their houses and hung festoons, flags, and lanterns on the streets. Chinatown residents set off firecrackers if they were allowed.\(^13\) Many Chinese Americans in other parts of the country also retained the tradition. The Los Angeles Chinatown, for example, welcomed the holiday with a dragon dance.\(^14\) The fight over whether to maintain the ethnic tradition continued until the
post–World War II years. Defenders, many of them from the business class, argued that it enabled Chinese Americans to retain their ethnic ties and to generate profits. Moreover, they argued, the Chinese government should not intervene in a long-kept tradition. But others contended that the ethnic community should follow the modern practice. Supporters of the Nationalist government (the dominant political force in the ROC) also refused to participate in new year celebrations. This debate continued until the Cold War, when ethnic leaders came to see the celebration as a valuable tool to help conform to U.S. political ideologies. But the persistence of some Chinese Americans compelled the CCBA and other organizations to continue hosting Chinese New Year banquets and other celebratory events throughout the first half of the twentieth century.15

This was a victory for the business community, which understood the power of Orientalist fantasy in the American imagination. The holiday decorations, the lion dances, and the booths on Grant Avenue were significant attractions for tourists.16 In 1907 a group of merchants in San Francisco formed the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to protect and promote their business interests. Chinese Americans in other cities, such as Honolulu, New York, and Vancouver, soon followed.17 In 1931 the Chinese Chamber of Commerce organized a Chinese New Year parade to attract visitors. The event included lion dances, concerts, and dramas. Female sexuality was another attraction: several Chinese American women dressed up as “Chinese maids” and served biscuits and tea to guests.18

Community organizations relied on traditional celebrations for fundraising. In 1927 St. Mary’s Chinese School organized the “Feast of Lanterns” to raise money for the school. The Lantern Festival took place two weeks after the Chinese New Year and marked the end of the new year celebration. The event included a beauty contest, a parade, stage performances, and a cabaret. Beauty pageant candidates were judged by the number of raffle tickets they sold. The 1927 parade was larger than it had been in previous years, including mainstream and community groups for the first time. Veterans, military and ethnic school bands and drill corps, Catholic and community marching teams, and community organization cars and floats jammed the parade route. Organizers also invited the San Francisco mayor to the event and asked him to assist in selling raffle tickets. Moreover, the parade was not confined to Chinatown: it started on Market Street, proceeded to Grant Avenue, through Pacific Avenue, then Stockton Street, and ended at St. Mary’s auditorium, on Stockton and Clay streets. Although rain forced
the organizers to change the parade time and caused some groups to withdraw, the event successfully attracted numerous spectators. The “Feast of Lanterns” may have provided a blueprint for post-World War II Chinese New Year celebrations.

While exotic traditions lured tourists into Chinatown, they did not prevent racial discrimination. During the 1935 Chinese New Year celebration, the police urged white Americans to stay away from Chinatown in light of a potential tong war that never materialized. Normally the coverage of the new year celebration did not appear on the first few pages, but the police warning was printed on the first page of the San Francisco Chronicle with a headline “S. F. Police Blockade Chinatown, Fearing Tong War Outbreak.” The two-day blockade resulted in huge financial losses for Chinatown businesses. The CCBA protested “a slander on our race.” It questioned the police’s decision to use a “petty squabble between two families as an excuse to punish a whole population,” even though the police never blocked “streets in the American section where murders [were] committed in broad daylight.” In that year, the police prohibited Chinese Americans from setting off firecrackers, until Chinese American protests compelled city hall to rescind the ban.

The Sino-Japanese war created a tremendous impact on the ethnic community and, especially, its celebration. Although most families continued their private observance, public events and celebrations such as the one staged by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce were cancelled in order to raise money for the war effort in China. Ethnic leaders also urged people not to shoot fireworks as powder was needed for the war. But they soon realized that public celebrations could help the ethnic community generate funds. In 1938 more than two thousand cities staged “Bowl of Rice Parties” to raise money for war relief in China. San Francisco Chinatown recreated an “Old Chinatown” which was not only decorated with colorful couplet banners and illuminated lanterns, but also was filled with Chinese American men and women clad in traditional Chinese attire. According to Chinese Digest reporter William Hoy, the event was “the most magnificent, heartwarming and spontaneous spectacle ever given in this 90-year community.” Categorized as “almost a family affair” by the San Francisco Chronicle, it effectively enhanced Chinatown’s business and collected money for the war in China. The 1940 “Bowl of Rice Party” in San Francisco took place during the Chinese New Year celebratory period. In an attempt to use Chinese culture to lure more attendees, organizers staged activities such as Chinese fashion shows, Chinese con-
certs, acrobatics, Chinese operas, and Chinese art exhibitions. The event was so successful that organizers hosted another “Bowl of Rice Party” in the following year.24

The amicable relations between China and the United States during World War II, coupled with the contribution of Chinese Americans both at home and in battle, significantly affected the ethnic community in the postwar years.

**CHANGING FATE**

During the 1946 Chinese New Year celebration, San Francisco’s Chinatown stores were brightly decorated, with holiday goods overflowing onto the sidewalks. Lions danced through the streets in a fundraising event for the Chinese Hospital. Even though no other public events were scheduled, visitors continued to pour into Chinatown during the one-week festivity.25 Chinese Americans certainly had a lot to celebrate. During World War II, they had gone from being the “yellow peril” to “heroic fighters,” especially in comparison with the “bad Japanese.”26 Changed perceptions also ended the anti-Chinese immigration laws. In 1943, Chinese immigrants finally gained the right of naturalization, although the immigration quota was limited to 105 persons annually.27 However, the most important phenomenon in postwar immigration was the large influx of women. By the 1960s, their children had become an important force for reform. The arrival of women also transformed the population from a bachelor society into a family community.

World War II opened up opportunities for Chinese Americans to integrate into the mainstream job market. Many of them entered into professional and technical fields, with some even reaching managerial level (see table 1). Yet this did not mean that Chinese Americans no longer encountered job discrimination. In 1950, 21 percent of San Francisco job openings still specified the undesirability of “Orientals.”28

Meanwhile, housing desegregation enabled middle-class Chinese Americans to move from Chinatown to other parts of the city and the larger San Francisco Bay Area. Cold War politics had compelled the federal government to advocate more civil rights measures in order to gain legitimacy as the world’s leading democracy.29 In 1948 the Supreme Court declared that restrictive covenants, which had prevented Chinese from moving into white neighborhoods, were unconstitutional.30 San Francisco’s Chinatown slowly began to extend beyond its old borders. The southern boundary
inched toward Bush Street, while the northern one merged into the North Beach Italian American community. The eastern border moved toward Sansome Street and the western one spread into the small valley located between Nob Hill and Russian Hill, reaching Van Ness Street. The largest outlying settled areas were in the middle-class residential districts of Sunset and Richmond. However, even though Chinese Americans had begun to move beyond old boundaries, discrimination continued to exist in certain neighborhoods, which remained closed to outsiders. Overall, Chinese Americans were optimistic in the post–World War II years. Nevertheless, they would soon find that they were facing an important political hurdle: the Cold War.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1940 Male</th>
<th>1940 Female</th>
<th>1950 Male</th>
<th>1950 Female</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total employed</td>
<td>33,625</td>
<td>2,829</td>
<td>40,111</td>
<td>8,278</td>
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<td>Clerical, sales, and kindred workers</td>
<td>3,422</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>4,512</td>
<td>3,210</td>
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<td>Craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,348</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Farm and farm managers</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm laborers (unpaid family workers)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>Farm laborers (wage workers and farm foremen)</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Laborers (except farm and mine)</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operatives and kindred workers</td>
<td>7,502</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>6,574</td>
<td>1,711</td>
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<td>Private household workers</td>
<td>1,954</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>514</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional, technical, and kindred workers</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>2,511</td>
<td>914</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proprietors, managers, and officials (except farm)</td>
<td>7,250</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>8,920</td>
<td>658</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service workers (except private household workers)</td>
<td>10,515</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>940</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>176</td>
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*Excludes those on emergency work.
The political climate of the early Cold War period often placed Chinese Americans under intense scrutiny. In 1949, when communists wrested control of mainland China and established the PRC, Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist government (the ROC) retreated to Taiwan. Americans felt betrayed by the loss of the mainland and made distinctions between Mao Zedong’s communist China and Chiang Kai-shek’s capitalist China. As one official of the State Department put it, “Because of what we did while others were treating them badly, we think the Chinese ought to be grateful to us. I run into this idea often, in our way of writing about China policy, our acts in China, back to Boxer days and John Hay. The Chinese should be grateful. That’s why we’re so riled up about Red China. That they should go and join up with the Russians makes us doubly mad.”

The PRC’s involvement in the Korean War (1950–53) intensified resentment toward the Chinese. Mainstream media portrayed them as “inhuman,” “treacherous,” and “deceitful, fighting hordes” who were killing “our boys,” a drastic departure from the World War II–era image of Chinese as “heroic” allies.

This resentment was projected onto Chinese Americans. It was not unusual for immigrant communities to become suspect when their ancestral countries were at war with the United States. German Americans had had to demonstrate that they were 110 percent American in World War I. And although Japanese Americans wasted no time in pledging their loyalty to the United States, they were still subjected to internment during World War II. Likewise, Chinese Americans faced hostilities after the outbreak of the Korean War. Shopkeepers and restaurateurs along Grant Avenue noticed that visitors were hostile, and angry Americans even ransacked a restaurant. “It was pretty bad,” American-born Chinatown resident Him Mark Lai recalled, “After China entered the war, [Chinese Americans] were treated like Japanese.”

Chemist and Chinatown resident Franklin Woo noted: “The McCarthy terror didn’t affect Chinatown as much as it could have. . . . But still I was very careful about circumventing things when I talked. You had to make sure you didn’t sound anti-American. Actually, I think the Korean War had a greater impact on Chinatown than McCarthyism. The whole atmosphere here then was fear. If you weren’t careful, you could be thrown into a concentration camp.” This fear was
heightened when Congress passed Title II of the McCarran Internal Security Act (Emergency Detention Act) in 1950, which legalized the internment of communists during a national emergency.38

Many community newspapers thus warned Chinese Americans of their vulnerable positions. Dai-Ming Lee editorialized in Chinese World, a bilingual ethnic newspaper: “We must remember that the present position of the Chinese people is a difficult one, particularly now when the Chinese Communists have invaded Korea. Any careless act could easily become grounds for misunderstanding.”39 The Chinese Press, an English-language community newspaper, also published the following message in bold print: “Truce may be pending in Korea, but all over the world the ruthless march of Communis[m] still is advancing. As long as the Communists are in power, the mother country of our origin, it is possible for eruptive public feelings against us. We must continue our good-will public relations and be on constant alert. . . . For the year ahead, we face the challenge of being still better American citizens . . . [and] to further understand our fellow Americans of other racial extractions and endeavor for their understanding of us.”40 Chinese Americans understood that since they were perceived to be foreigners, their lives were contingent upon U.S. foreign policy. To counter the hostility, ethnic leaders proposed to reduce racial tensions by being “better” citizens.

Although the U.S. government never did intern Chinese Americans during the Cold War, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) harassed many of them. For example, beginning in 1951, the INS required blood tests for both Chinese immigrant applicants and their parents (generally fathers) to determine if they had legal relatives in the United States. Other medical tests such as X-rays and dental examinations were used to determine the age of the applicants. The INS and the FBI subjected the ethnic community to intrusive investigations and yet never found any suspected communists.41

This absence of communists did not prevent federal agents from investigating Chinese Americans. On the contrary, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 armed them with new power to deport anyone who had connections with communist regimes, even if they were naturalized citizens. Because the FBI had a hard time finding evidence to prosecute Chinese American leftist organizations, it began to seek the assistance of the INS. The FBI’s quest to find communists thus legitimized the INS to “link immigration fraud with subversive activities.” The INS saw the communist pretext as a perfect opportunity to crack down on illegal immigration. As a result, the
federal government began to use the connection between illegal immigrants and “Red” Chinese to investigate potential suspects. Agents would randomly stop Chinese Americans in various Chinatowns to see if they had proper documents. As Maurice Chuck of San Francisco recalled, “They would stop you on the street. Harassed you and asked you all sorts of questions, push you around. It became a daily part of our lives in Chinatown during that time.” The FBI even questioned children in playgrounds or schools, thereby motivating some parents to instruct their children on how to answer questions. As one resident recalled, “One day, my mother told me to use a different name in school.” This harassment was a constant source of anxiety for many, especially those who entered the country as “paper sons.” Paper sons claimed to be the children of either merchants or U.S. citizens, two groups that were allowed entry to the United States during the Exclusion Era (1882–1943). While some paper sons were in fact legitimate, many Chinese used this practice to circumvent the Chinese Exclusion Acts. If the real identity of a paper son were to be discovered, he would be deported to China. This anxiety was not specific to the Bay Area. Helen Zia recalled that her father, who lived in suburban New Jersey, was suspected of communist leanings because he expressed his political opinions in Chinese newspapers. FBI agents likewise questioned Tung Pok Chin, a laundry operator in New Jersey, even though Chin had served in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

The INS did deport or jail some Chinese Americans, especially those who were PRC sympathizers or members of leftist organizations, such as Min Qing (the Chinese-American Democratic Youth League) and the China Daily News. Established in San Francisco in 1946, Min Qing—a social, educational, and cultural group—had a large Chinese-language collection in its library, including works written by communist Chinese. Because of members’ sympathy to the political developments in the PRC, government agents questioned their American patriotism. For example, when American-born Rolland Lowe enlisted for the Korean War, an intelligence agent visited his military compound in Korea to investigate his loyalty background. Moreover, when the INS found that other members or their ancestors had entered the country illegally, it stripped them of their citizenship or sent them to jail. Maurice Chuck was one such victim. He had immigrated to the United States in 1947 with his father, who had entered as a paper son. His membership in Min Qing triggered the INS to investigate his father’s immigration fraud. Similar investigations compelled members to finally disband Min Qing in 1959.
The FBI also scrutinized leftist newspapers. The *China Daily News*—a Chinese-language newspaper supported by New York’s Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance (CHLA), with a focus on the latest developments in the PRC—became the target of an FBI investigation in 1951. The newspaper had received $150 for publishing an advertisement for a PRC bank that helped Chinese Americans wire money to their families in China. Authorities accused the paper of violating the Trading with the Enemy Act, which forbade any monetary exchange with enemies of the United States. As a result, Eugene Moy, editor of the *China Daily News*, went to jail along with three laundry workers who had sent money home. Several newspaper workers committed suicide or were deported; altogether, sixty-five hundred were investigated by the FBI. The *China Daily News* was not alone. The *China Weekly* and the *Chung Sai Yat Po*, both published in San Francisco, were shut down when frightened readers cancelled subscriptions and businesses rescinded advertisements. Surviving community newspapers—except *Chinese World*, the *Chinese Pacific Weekly*, and the *China Daily News*, which still maintained dissenting voices—shifted to pro-Nationalist and old-establishment stances.

Anticommunist hysteria and the ideological war between the PRC and the United States forced the ethnic community to grow closer to the Nationalists in Taiwan. This was not the first time that the interests of Chinese America were interwoven with Chinese politics. The competition between Sun Yat-sen’s republican Xingzhonghui (later reorganized as the Tongmenghui and then the Kuomintang, i.e., the KMT or Nationalist Party) and the imperial Baohuanghui was entangled with the question of Chinese exclusion. Political disenfranchisement encouraged Chinese immigrants to identify with China during the Exclusion Era. They thus actively participated in homeland politics, hoping that a strong China could defend their rights. When Japan invaded China in 1937, the KMT seized the opportunity to exploit Chinese American ethnic and nationalist sentiments and successfully recruited the leaders of the old establishment to gain political influence in Chinatown.

In the early Cold War era, the KMT profited from anticommunist hysteria and the PRC embargo to advance its political, cultural, and economic influence in Chinatown. With the help of the FBI and the INS, it successfully purged PRC supporters. Any anti-Nationalists or leftists were accused of being communists and suffered harassment from the FBI and the INS. New York’s Kang Jai Association, which was sympathetic to the PRC, was the subject of an INS raid just before the 1951 Chinese New Year. Agents
“claimed to have seized ‘tremendous amounts’ of alleged Communist literature.” As a result, eighty-three people were detained.\(^{51}\) Meanwhile, the Nationalist government of Taiwan rewarded supporters, such as those in the CCBA, with governmental positions. Additionally, the Taiwan government sponsored newspapers and activities in Chinatown to discourage possible pro-PRC cultural events.\(^{52}\) The embargo against the PRC provided Taiwan with an opportunity to export mushrooms, Chinese artwork, and other light industry goods to the United States. It thus became a dominant political, cultural, and economic force in Chinatown for more than twenty years.\(^{53}\) Only after Nixon’s visit to the PRC in 1972 and the normalization of relations in 1979 did the Nationalist government gradually lose control in Chinatown. Yet the controversy between two competing foreign governments continued to be a focal point in the Chinese American community in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Conservative groups such as the CCBA also manipulated the anticommunist hysteria to enhance their power in the community. The CCBA of San Francisco enjoyed full political control until the 1930s, when the growing popularity of Marxist ideology in China and the United States and the increase of class and ethnic consciousness among workers and students precipitated the emergence of pro-labor, pro-left groups, and student organizations in Chinatown. For example, the CHLA was established in 1933 in New York for the welfare of laundry workers.\(^{54}\) Workers in San Francisco also formed the Chinese Workers Mutual Aid Association (CWMAA) in 1937 to address working conditions and to study Marxist theory. Students in New York formed the Chinese Youth Club (Niuyue huaqiao qingnian jiuguo tuan) in 1937, while their counterparts in San Francisco established the Chinese Youth League, the predecessor of the Min Qing organization.\(^{55}\) These student groups welcomed both men and women from all class backgrounds, in contrast to the male merchant dominance of the old establishment. Some women even assumed leadership roles in Min Qing.\(^{56}\) Widespread anticommunist hysteria during the Cold War encouraged the CCBA to take a loyalty pledge to the Nationalist government. The Nationalists also granted political and economic interests to CCBA leaders, which further motivated the group to identify with Taiwan. The CCBA thus manipulated the anticommunist hysteria to eliminate its rivals, branding those who criticized either the Nationalists or the old establishment as communists.\(^{57}\) Even those who urged Chinese Americans to shy away from transnational political conflicts and focus instead on domestic issues were blacklisted. Gilbert Woo, for instance, was under
constant attack for not supporting the Nationalist government in his Chinese-language newspaper, the *Chinese Pacific Weekly*.

In order to consolidate its power, the old establishment and pro-Nationalist groups invited federal agents to scrutinize leftist and anti-Nationalist organizations. Agents recruited Chinese Americans as government informants in order to penetrate community organizations, thus creating an opportunity for the federal government to intervene in community affairs previously closed to the outside world. The presence of Chinese informants unsurprisingly created anxiety among community members. Consequently, pro-Nationalist groups began to gain control in Chinatown; by the early 1960s, Chinese American leftist groups had virtually disappeared.

The U.S. embargo against the PRC further exacerbated the effects of political repression. The embargo forced the closure of Chinese dry goods stores, grocery stores, and pharmacies. Many curio and souvenir stores had to stock Japanese toys and gift articles. Not only did tourism decline, but many Chinese Americans also stopped coming to Chinatown for fear of being questioned by the FBI or INS.

Even though Chinese Americans faced political persecution from both the U.S. federal government and the Nationalist government of Taiwan, the Cold War political climate compelled politicians and the press to denounce racism. San Francisco Mayor General Richard Mittels perhaps sensed the antagonism when he issued a statement that praised Chinese Americans as patriots who had “served with distinction” in the last war. He further stated that they did not need to fear anti-Chinese sentiments. A *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial, printed on December 2, 1950, noted that the “Chinese in Chinatown are predominantly anti-Communist. . . . To show resentment of them merely plays the Communist game of setting races against each other.” The editor concluded: “Most Chinese are Americans, too, and anyone who display[s] a prejudice toward them on [sic] discriminate, mass basis is displaying a lack of respect for American citizenship itself.” The rhetoric of “good Chinese” and “bad Chinese” was used to remind the general public that because Chinese Americans were wartime patriots, they should be regarded as good Americans.

Ethnic leaders certainly understood that they had to exploit the image of the anticommunist “good Chinese.” Even though Chinese immigrants were able to obtain citizenship starting in 1943, this did not guarantee protection, especially considering the precedent of Japanese American internment. As such, they needed to demonstrate their patriotism to gain acceptance. These
circumstances motivated ethnic leaders on both coasts to pledge "100 percent loyalty to Uncle Sam." Albert K. Chow, Democratic Party leader and the unofficial mayor of San Francisco’s Chinatown, claimed that many “young Chinese-Americans are enlisting to fight the Communists right now. We plan all-out support for America’s war effort. [We] will automatically back American policy in the Far East or anywhere else.” The leaders not only pledged their loyalty, but also adamantly emphasized that the majority of Chinese were not communists. Shavey Lee, the unofficial mayor of New York’s Chinatown, emphasized that “Chinese people on the whole—and that means 99 percent of them—whether in China, America, or any other place in the world, are NOT Communists.” At the same time, other leaders underscored the fact that the majority of Chinese Americans were born in the United States. George Moy, executive secretary of the On Leong Merchants’ Association of Washington, D.C., remarked, “Why should there be any sympathy for the Communists? The people here are second, third, fourth, and even fifth generation Americans. This is our home.” Indeed, about half of the Chinese Americans were native born in the mid-1950s.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned loyalty pledge and the efforts made by Chinese Americans during the 1951 Chinese New Year celebration, as described in the beginning of this chapter, failed to protect them from discrimination. Not only did they continue to suffer from political, social, and economic oppression, but they also found themselves in a catch-22 position involving monetary extortion by the PRC. While the Treasury Department allowed other Americans to send money to rescue relatives who were under arrest in China, Chinese Americans were prohibited from doing so, and were accused of violating the Trading with the Enemy Act.

The problems Chinese Americans faced in the 1950s compelled them to assimilate into mainstream society. For example, Tung Pok Chin of New Jersey began to celebrate American holidays and redecorated his laundry shop and living quarters to “look as American as possible.” He even discarded Chinese newspapers, only displaying Life Magazine and the New York Times in his store. Lai recalled similar occurrences in San Francisco. “A lot of Chinese tended not to stress Chineseness at all. . . . People from that generation did not know much Chinese. People moved to suburbs [and] did not go to Chinese school any more. They didn’t talk much about China.” Many of them therefore chose to shy away from ethnic cultures, as they believed that minimizing their Chineseness would demonstrate their American patriotism. However, they soon found out that assimilation was not a good strategy; the Cold War motivated the United States
to reformulate its national identity as “a pluralistic nation of immigrants,” which encouraged ethnic minorities to celebrate their dual identity.⁷⁰

**CONCLUSION**

The Chinese New Year celebration in the United States meant more than an indication of ethnic retention. While Chinese immigrants brought this old world tradition with them to maintain their transnational ties, they also used the occasion to forge bonds among themselves. But even old world traditions proved to be unstable, as shown by the Republican government’s decision to eliminate the Chinese New Year celebration. Accordingly, the ethnic community was pressured to do the same. Nevertheless, ethnic bonds and economic profits eventually outweighed political concerns and motivated Chinese Americans to continue to honor the ethnic holiday. The celebration, in fact, became a tool for the community to attract tourists into Chinatown and to raise money for the Sino-Japanese War during World War II.

While the victory of World War II temporarily brought Chinatown back to a celebratory mode, the fall of China to the communists and the treacherous political climate in Cold War America again subjected Chinese Americans to vulnerable political and economic positions. Ethnic leaders thus considered the Chinese New Year celebration as an important occasion to voice Chinese American patriotism and to rescue troubled Chinatown businesses. Yet this time, these leaders did not simply sell the exotic characteristics of the ethnic celebration, but also situated it in Cold War rhetoric and policy.